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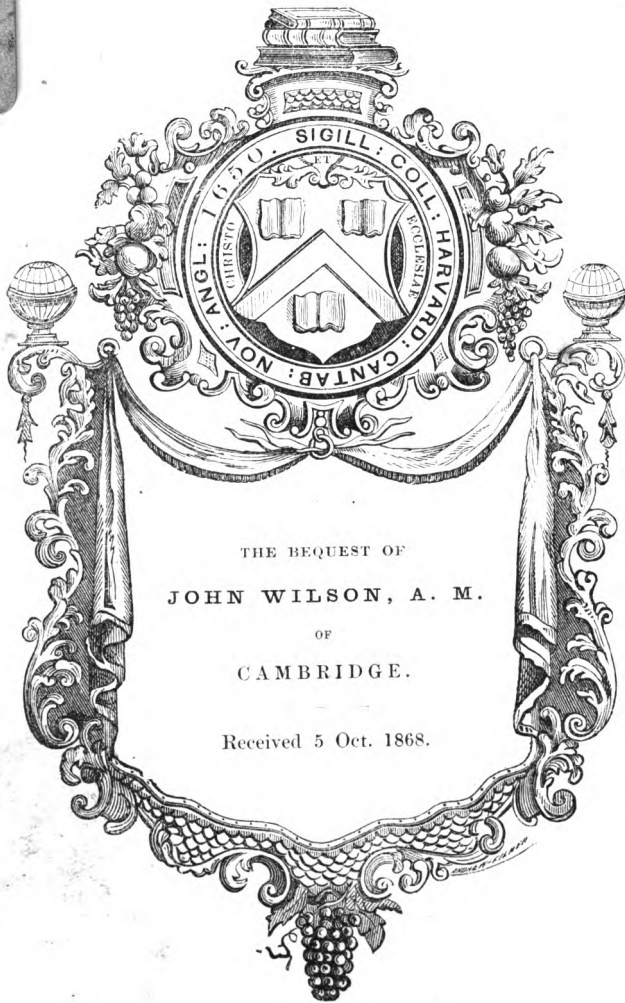
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John Wilson

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# HOW I BECAME A UNITARIAN:

EXPLAINED IN

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

BY

A CLERGYMAN

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

*E. W. Ayer?*

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## PREFACE.

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It is a common fault of mankind to condemn that most which they least understand. I have therefore given these Letters to the public, with a view to conciliate the opinions of those among my friends who are probably most surprised and offended by what they may be pleased to call my apostasy. If in their perusal of my reasons they do not find sufficient force of argument to change their convictions, they will, at least, meet with enough to soften the harshness of their judgment; they will see that there may be reasons, — and those not light ones, — why others should differ with them in the matter of their religious belief. I will beg of them, therefore, for the sake of that charity which hopeth all things, that they will condescend to give them a candid and dispassionate consideration.



# LETTERS.

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## LETTER I.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

You desire to know how I became a Unitarian. That is, by what course of reflection and of argument I was led to abandon the communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and to embrace a system of doctrine and polity so far removed from the time-honored faith of my forefathers. I propose now, in a series of plain and unstudied epistles, to gratify that desire; and to the best of my humble ability to enlighten what you are pleased facetiously to term your darkness. You will not, therefore, expect from me a learned treatise on theology. That would be to attempt to instruct one in every respect my superior. I will but relate to you my own experience, and leave you to form your own conclusions.

You know that mine has never been a prose-

lyting spirit, and that I am so much of a philosopher as to believe that mere theological opinions have very little to do with true religious sentiment; and that for this reason, at least, the toleration I thereby extend to others, I have a right to demand for myself. I do demand it, not only in the name of Christian charity, that greatest of virtues, but also in the name of a common erring humanity. My appeal is to God, to conscience, and to reason. You will, therefore, I doubt not, freely accord me the character of candor, and allow that I am actuated by a sincere desire to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

From my earliest years my attention has been drawn toward the subject of religion as an object of speculative inquiry. It has always appeared to me as the first and last great question of interest to mankind. I have uniformly so esteemed and treated it. A feeling of habitual reverence for the Supreme Being has ever been a predominant characteristic of my nature; and as this has been drawn out and moulded by education, it has deepened into a sentiment quite independent of the bias of sectarianism. It is the one sentiment that has been, through my otherwise checkered and troubled existence, a source of calm, patient, and

humble hope. Whatever may have been my changes of opinion upon other subjects, my confidence in the goodness and wisdom of God has never forsaken me. And while I now pen these words, I lift up my heart toward him moved by the most grateful emotions, and render him my silent homage for those sweet and elevating hopes with which he has been pleased to inspire it.

And yet I am free to confess that I am not what would be called a "devout person," as that character is generally understood in the religious world. That is to say, I shrink with a natural modesty from making my feelings the subject of conversation. I cannot but think that real, native piety is unobtrusive; not open-mouthed and vain-glorious. The fire that is kindled in the sacred precincts of the breast should be guarded like the lamp tended by vestal hands in the silence of the temple. A man's opinions are for the world; but his thoughts — the silent gushings of his religious affections — are for the ear of God alone. Let us not, then, be guilty of the vulgar error of declaiming upon a man's piety, when the matter in controversy is his theological belief. That is for the closet; this, for the forum.

Having this early bias toward the discussion



of religious ideas, you may be sure that I could not remain an indifferent spectator of those excitements and disputes that occasionally arrested my attention. Nor did I. I was often carried away by them. But seldom for a long time. That which was merely emotional generally gave way to that which was intellectual. If I became at times an enthusiast, it was only that, when the ardor of passion had cooled, I might become a thinker. So that I soon began to distinguish between feeling and thinking, and to refuse my faith to every emotion that could not bear the scrutiny of reason. For man's claim to dominion over inferior nature is founded in the dignity and greatness of his intellectual faculties. To say, with a great poet of England, "as we feel, we think," is to abandon this claim, and forfeit the noble distinction of having been created after the likeness of our Divine Original. It is under the right direction of mind alone, that feelings can become to us a source of happiness; for truant and ill-regulated desires, that bring misery and destruction, are such as refuse the control of reason; and whether in religion, morals, literature, or politics,—or the ordinary affairs of life,—are sure to lead us as far astray from truth, as from the dictates of sobriety and prudence.

To say that reason errs, is but saying that we are all imperfect. But it is the best guide we possess; and our great care should be to keep it free from the bias of party and sectarian feeling, to seek by diligent inquiry to enlighten it, and to see that its decisions are grounded in righteousness and truth. Then, though in the course of your progress you may fall into some errors of opinion, you will emerge again into the light, and at length become established in those liberal and universal principles which will prove your unfailing solace and guide to everlasting peace. Therefore, I say, seek truth above all things. "The truth shall make you free," whatever else be your condition in life.

It was my fortune, before I became mature in mind and well-grounded in the knowledge of facts, to become sceptical. And it was in this condition of mental independence and hardihood, that I found plenty of "friends" to assist me with their advice, and to confirm in me those dark doubts, which end in plunging the soul into the trackless mazes of unprofitable speculation. But, happily, it was not my destiny to remain there. So long as I doubted, I was discontented. Those scarcely developed religious intuitions which had

been my early joy, became my elder pain. Religion I felt to be as necessary to my moral life, as the air to the vital action of my physical being. I could not do without it. My nature craved it. The want of it desolated the world of its attractions and its joys. For to shut me up to this brief and troubled scene of existence was to deny to my hopes every thing that was becoming an immortal soul. And where was I to find a response to these hopes, but in the Gospels? I therefore set about a course of reading on the evidences of Christianity. I became at length satisfied of the genuineness and authenticity of the books composing the New Testament canon. Upon these grounds I again accepted Christianity, and thought I had learned to appreciate the value of the remark, that he who has never doubted has never believed.

I now turned my attention toward the ministry. It presented to my mind a subject for most delightful study, and offered a kind of employment which would satisfy my ambition of being useful to my fellow-mortals. That I was moved to take upon me the office of a preacher by those supernatural intimations to which some lay claim, I would not affirm. I do not know that they

would have been to me a sufficient justification of my conduct, if I had. I would choose to be guided by something more level to my understanding.

But I had not been long occupied in my new vocation, before other and unanticipated difficulties began to disturb the serenity of my mind. When I began to extend the scope of my theological reading, I found that I had pledged myself to something beside my Bible. I found that I had shut myself up in a cast-iron system, made venerable by the rust of antiquity, but which could be neither expanded nor contracted to suit the wants of the age without danger of fracture, and perhaps of entire destruction. I found that I had bound myself hand and foot with the ligatures of a creed, and surrendered to articles and formularies my whole range of thought and inquiry for ever; that I had entered a Church that conceded every thing to private judgment, but the liberty to think; and that, although not exercising the Romish function of infallibility, yet reserved to itself the power to decide in matters of controversy, with the charitable allowance of dissent under anathema. And all this was supported by a ponderous array of Apostolic authority and precept.

I was willing that the Church should have her reasons; but I also desired to have mine. While she was looking backward, I was looking forward. She was conservative, I progressive.

The first ground of difficulty upon which I stumbled was the doctrine of the Trinity, — a doctrine about which every body dogmatizes, but nobody reasons. Then followed that of a Vicarious Atonement; then, Eternal Punishments, &c., &c. To be sure, these doctrines were professedly deduced from Scripture. I could not deny that. I know it is usual, in such cases, to call upon a man to submit his judgment to the authority of the Church. It may be safe so to do in some cases. And I would willingly have done it for the sake of peace, had it been possible. With me it was impossible. It seemed to me that I was bound to respect the deductions of reason. I was answerable to God for its exercise; and the Church, unlike her mother of Rome, offered me no guarantee against this, my individual responsibility; — a fact, I beg leave to remark, in a “holy catholic and Apostolic Church,” making so large demands upon one’s credence and submission, which implies a very great defect in her system.

Well, I turned to those Scriptures to which the

Church directed me, and to which she herself professes to defer. But while I found that she claimed no authority to ordain any thing "contrary to God's word written," she limited my faith by her interpretation of that word. This was, in fact, shutting up that word to me as an individual. Which, again, is another defect in her system; placing her in a situation by no means so advantageous as her mother of Rome, who reads the word herself alone for her children, and thus saves them from the perils of false judgment.

Hence, I am tempted to say, in this place, that the appeal of modern orthodox churches to private judgment is a mere pretence. Where there is a "confession of faith," a creed, or a fixed rule of interpretation, around which a congregation is gathered, there liberty of thought is no more. And if there were needed any further proof of this, it might be found in the acrimony of their disputes, and the discredit they seek to cast upon the profession of Liberal Christianity. In this respect the Church of Rome is far more honest. She denies the right of private judgment, without qualification, and upon this ground refuses the Bible to her laity. She claims infallibility, and she acts in accordance with that claim. She comes forward

as a mediator between God and man, and she assumes the responsibility of the act. But the Protestant Episcopal Church, while seeking *to do* all that Rome does, shrinks from the avowal of it, and thereby exposes at once her pretensions and her feebleness. She would have us believe that she is infallible,—she would rule us with this rod of authority,—but, when pressed by argument, gives up her defences, and sinks back into the rank of voluntary associations. Surely there can be nothing so unbecoming a Church as this.

But I turned, I say, to the Scriptures. I was satisfied of their Divine authority. I was willing to abide by what they taught. Taking the Church's rule of interpretation, these obnoxious doctrines might be, to a certain extent, established; provided, always, that you did not exceed that rule. Here a difficulty presented itself that seemed at first almost insuperable. What was I to do? It was no longer possible for me to reject the voice of Scripture. And yet could Scripture and an enlightened reason disagree? Both bore the impress of their Divine originality. The question then occurred, What is inspiration? Are there kinds and degrees of inspiration? And if so, what kind and degree of inspiration are we to accord

to these Scriptures? This question appeared to me of very great importance; for the kind of inspiration claimed by orthodox Christians is called "plenary inspiration"; thereby implying that every word and every sentence penned by the sacred writers was expressed to them by the Holy Spirit. Hence, it would leave no room for diversity of inference in the reader. It would point out and define, with more than logical precision, exactly what was to be believed. For every word of God must be without imperfection or alloy. It must be plain to every understanding. Else it would fail of its purpose.

But was this so? And if so, how are we to account for religious differences of opinion? Differences, indeed, that, taken in detail or in the aggregate, amount to a denial of every doctrine enunciated. Here was a question that demanded of me a patient and careful solution. It is a question, too, that, in every religious controversy, presents itself at the threshold, and requires to be definitively disposed of, before any satisfactory progress can be made. Permit me, therefore, to make it the subject of my next letter.



## LETTER II.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

THERE is a definition of the term *Inspiration* to be found in Webster, as applied to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which I beg leave here to quote. He defines it as “the infusion of ideas into the mind by the Holy Spirit; the conveying into the minds of men ideas, notices, or monitions, by extraordinary or supernatural influence; or, the communication of the Divine Will to the understanding by suggestions or impressions on the mind, which leave no room to doubt the reality of their supernatural origin.” Webster, as you well know, was a Presbyterian; which fact it is important to remark, when one of an opposite opinion is about to make use of his words. They are not quoted by me, however, with a view to controversy; but only for the purpose of serv-

ing as a point of agreement between us before opening the argument.

Now I accept this definition. It is broad and comprehensive enough for us both. I believe as firmly in the Divine inspiration of the sacred writers as you do. But I do not affirm, what appears to me to be the opinion of your Church, that they were preserved from all error; that is, that they were the infallible interpreters of the Divine Mind in all things and upon every occasion. I believe that the degrees of their inspiration were various; and that often they but expressed their individual judgment, and desired so to be understood. This appears to me to be a fact which can be easily established. But I shall not avail myself of all, or indeed of one tenth part, of the proof which it would be no great labor to summon to my aid on this occasion. For my part, I do not look for the evidences of Divine inspiration in the *letter* of the Bible, but in its *spirit*. I see, there a great number of sacred books, written in a great variety of styles,—in language, and even sentiment, peculiar to the age and country; bearing the impression of contemporaneous opinions and customs, and marked to a greater or less degree by those crude and undeveloped notions of

moral and physical science common to a remote era. In the very first chapter of the book of Genesis I recognize so distinctly the marks of a Divine communication, that, were all the rest of the Bible destroyed, I would fix my faith unalterably upon the truth of this. Although written some four thousand years ago, when all knowledge upon the subject of cosmogony was but the product of speculation, — when it had not yet become a science, and offered no experimental evidences of its truth, — it has yet preceded discovery as a declaration of the *order* of creation, which recent investigation is not only daily confirming, but may find convenient to follow as a guide in the formation of theory. Hence we affirm that this account of the work of the creation is true in its general and more important aspects, but inaccurate in its details. It was penned, beyond question or doubt in my mind, by what Webster calls “the infusion of ideas into the mind by the Holy Spirit,” — that is, by Divine Inspiration ; but, mind you, not by “plenary inspiration” ; not in a way to save the writer from mingling his own individual preconceptions with the general impressions received ; not in a way to prevent him from imbuing them with his characteristic modes of expression and perception of the subject.

To insist upon more than this, as some writers do, and to demand an unqualified reception of every word as of Divine authority, is to leave the dissentient no resource but infidelity. It is to require more than science is willing to concede, or can concede, and therefore to provoke it to become the assailant. This is not wise. It is injurious to the interests of true religion. That some parts of Scripture will bear this close construction of a plenary inspiration I willingly allow. As, for instance, the Decalogue; and others which it would be tedious, if not invidious, to refer to. But it will not admit of a general application.

Take the history of the patriarchs, of the judges, the heroes, the kings of Israel, and run your eye carefully through the incidents and sentiments, moral, religious, social, or political, by which they were severally distinguished, and you must discover a great deal for exception, if not for positive rebuke. The best of these were men who were not free from the prejudices, the superstition, the narrow views, and often depraved passions, of their time. So will you often find their very cruelties and vices not only related without censure by the sacred penmen, but often indirectly applauded. The very Psalms of David have much, amid their

rich bursts of eloquence, and of tender and holy feeling, that shocks the moral sense, and makes the soul shudder at their ferocity. They reveal to us not merely what the Spirit suggested, but also what that "man of blood," as the prophet calls him, thought, and felt, and uttered, unmindful of the Divine mind.

But it is not my desire to multiply instances. I seek but to establish a principle which I conceive to be of the first importance to a right understanding and rational appreciation of the worth of Scripture. I would wish to discredit that superstitious reverence which seeks to make them responsible for more than they can bear; which, indeed, ministers to sectarian bigotry, but not to the growth of a large and comprehensive spirit of brotherly love.

Christianity as an institution does not rest upon rites and ceremonies, or upon particular creeds and ecclesiastical organizations; nor does it depend for its right application and development upon particular modes of interpretation. It is a spirit,—a life,—speaking to and awakening the religious intuitions of its disciples, and giving them form and expression. To apprehend this aright, we must apply it to our thoughts and conduct, as

they relate to God and our neighbor. We talk among ourselves about what is fundamental in Christianity, — that upon which orthodox sects agree. But we do not mean by this the element of religious principle, but its doctrinal expression. We fall into the error of supposing that the dogmas of the Trinity, of Vicarious Atonement, of Eternal Punishments, &c., comprise the essentials of a religious belief. Yet these dogmas ever have been, and ever will be, disputed. They are external to Christianity. They belong to what is called the Church; and the Church is the product of human prejudice, as we see it in its present visible organization. That which is fundamental and essential in Christianity is its spirit, and this is permanent. It requires neither creed nor formula for its preservation. Its life is in the human soul; and when it dies out there, no dogma or ecclesiastical order can revive it. It is the function of so-called religious bodies by teaching and association to sustain it there; to disseminate its influences; to inculcate with a disinterested zeal its precepts; and to avoid, of all things, the error of attempting to limit it by denominations. It was the one great purpose of its Founder to deliver it from the hands of ritualists and doctors

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of the law. It was to address itself to men as to little children. It was itself to be received as a little child. And all were thus to be gathered together in the presence of one Father in heaven.

In regard to the first propagators of this religion, the Apostles, through whom we receive it, it is not so much a matter of consequence to us whether they were learned men, as whether they were honest, men of integrity, men of truth. We look to their moral much more than to their intellectual qualifications for the labor to which they were called. That they possessed these qualifications in the highest possible degree; that they not only sacrificed their lives as a testimony to its Divine origin, but, still more, lived a life of trial and suffering, of reproach and persecution, in exemplification of its power,—is evidence enough of this. It is a kind of evidence that increases in value the more it is examined. It is sufficient to establish Christianity as an historical fact, at least.

But tried by the standard of a contemporary literary judgment, they were pronounced to be “unlearned and ignorant men.” This is what one of their own number records of them, even after the Pentecostal illumination. And I am not aware that they claimed for themselves—with the ex-

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ception of St. Paul, and possibly of St. Luke—any thing more. With extraordinary spiritual insight, with a momentary gift of tongues, with rare eloquence, with a power over nature almost omnipotent, they were yet simple-minded, credulous men. And, as a natural consequence, when they attempted to discourse upon secular matters, or even upon matters of a religious character which exceeded the limits of their mission, they indulged speculation, and sometimes fell into error. Though their gifts may have made them under some circumstances presumptuous, they never claimed to be infallible. They had the treasure confided them in earthen vessels, that the power might be seen to be of God, and not of men. They were consciously the “weak things,” and the “things that were despised,” in the presence of the logical acuteness, the philosophic lore, the polish, of the great men of their day. And obviously these facts were predetermined for them by a wisdom above their own. They left more room for the display of the spirit that wrought in and through them. They left the great truths of the Gospel to be their own witnesses to the hearts of men. They left, too, profitable occupation for those who should peruse their words, in the application of an impartial



spirit of criticism to what they wrote. Let us not, therefore, fall into the vulgar error of supposing we can treat their writings with too much freedom, so long as we treat them with candor and impartiality.

There is a passage in 2 Tim. iii. 16, which is often quoted to sustain the doctrine of a plenary inspiration. It is this: — “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable,” &c. Now there are two objections to the reception of this passage in the sense applied to it. The first is, St. Paul had in view the Old Testament Scriptures, and not the New; for the latter were not yet collected and acknowledged. Therefore it cannot apply in the latter respect. The second is, that, the particle *καί* being omitted, as Clarke affirms, by almost all the *Versions*, and by many of the *Fathers*, leaves us at liberty to question the rendering. Taking the best authorities for our guide, we should write the sentence as follows: —

“Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος, ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, κ. τ. λ.

— Every scripture (or writing) divinely inspired is profitable,” &c. For St. Paul would hardly venture to say that all writing *is* divinely inspired, even admitting his reference to the Old Testament; since at least the historical parts of that

might, in many instances, be open to the question without suspicion of irreverence in the objector.

So, in regard to the claim the Apostle seems to make, in a second instance, for a Divine authority in the enunciation of certain general principles in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, when he says he does not speak "in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, — ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης λόγους, — but which the Holy Ghost teacheth"; it must be plain to any candid mind consulting the context, that the rendering in this instance should be far more free, as he evidently refers to the manner of disputation or style of oratory common to the Greek sophists and rhetoricians, and not to the particular words. St. Paul meant to say, that he did not depend upon force of verbal argument, but upon Divine influence, — not upon oratorical show, but upon demonstration of the spirit and of power. It is therefore an unfair use of the passage to adduce it in support of the doctrine of plenary inspiration.

Dr. Whitby, a learned divine of the Church of England, thus writes respecting it: — "That it was not always so is evident, both from the consideration that they (the Apostles) were hagiographers, who are supposed to be left to the use of their

own words, and from the variety of style in which they wrote, and from the solecisms which are sometimes visible in their compositions; and more especially from their own words, which manifestly show that, in some cases, they had no such suggestion from the Holy Ghost as doth imply that he dictated those *words* unto them." And this testimony is worth so much the more, that it comes from a writer of great authority in the Church, and professedly entertaining orthodox opinions.

But it must be evident to every person carefully perusing the Epistles, that these exceptions obtain to a very great extent. How often are these Epistles occupied with matters of a merely secular or personal nature! how often do they descend to the discussion of topics of local and temporary interest! how often contain expressions of surprise, fear, doubt, implying the most complete uncertainty of purpose and intelligence! "By Sylvanus, a faithful brother, as I *suppose*," says St. Peter. Then St. Paul, — *Τυχὸν παραμεινῶ*, — "*Perhaps* I will abide, yea, winter with you." Again, "I *hope*, by your prayers, to be given unto you," &c. "I *hope* to come to you," &c. "For," again says Whitby, "*Spes est incertæ rei nomen*, the word hope implies an uncertainty, whereas the Holy

Spirit cannot be uncertain of any thing; nor can we think he would inspire men to speak 'uncertainly.' And this looks very little like plenary inspiration.

Indeed, we sometimes find St. Paul committing mistakes, or uttering contradictory counsels, that are far more serious than these slight expressions of uninspired mind. For example, in 1 Cor. vii. 38, he advises against marriage; and yet, in 1 Tim. ii. 15, he tells us that a woman "shall be saved in child-bearing";—more properly "*through* child-bearing," — σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, — "if she continues in faith," &c. That is, she shall be saved through the instrumentality of child-bearing, if she observe the usual conditions of a godly life. Thus making child-bearing the saving act, without which godliness would profit her nothing; from which doctrine it might be maliciously inferred, that the writer desired to secure this end independently of the marriage contract. But it would be wrong to doubt the Apostle's morality. Either he had forgotten what he had before written to the Corinthians, or he had seen reasons for changing his mind; or he wrote in a fit of abstraction, his attention being occupied with something else. In either category, it must be conceded that he *some-*

*times* — and these times might easily be shown to be many — wrote without the special direction and guidance of the Divine Spirit.

But these errors do not in the least militate against the truth of the Scriptures. They are what are to be looked for in every thing passing through human hands. The clearest mediums deflect the stream of light that falls upon them; and how much more shall the mind of man, with its prepossessions, its passions, and silly egotisms, distort and obscure the ray of heavenly truth that seeks to penetrate it, or to find its expression in our stammering tongue! So we may say of the variety and discrepancy of statement made in the Gospels of particular transactions, that, while the different aspects under which they were seen by the different writers go far to establish the truth of the transactions themselves, they at the same time forbid the inference that their separate accounts were the infallible dictate of the same spiritual intelligence; because, if they wrote, in every instance, under such special guidance, their accounts could not vary, — they would relate, not merely what each writer saw for himself, but actually and solely what was said and done, — neither more nor less. For the Holy Spirit would report

facts and words in their entirety, and not by partial and sometimes contradictory particulars. In a question respecting the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospel narratives, these discrepancies, no less than the personal opinions of the writers, may go to establish a historical fact; but in so far as it regards their "plenary inspiration," they must necessarily have a contrary effect. This must be left out of the account; for to insist upon it under these circumstances, is to repel the confidence of the intelligent inquirer, not to secure his faith.

## LETTER III.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

I DID wish to embrace within the space allotted to a single letter all I designed to say upon this preliminary question of inspiration. For it is not my intention to treat it at large, since to do this would require me to write a book of pretty fair dimensions. But there remains one very important fact to speak of, to which I will now beg your attention. Indeed, I might be safe in affirming that it is a fact which covers the whole ground, and is of itself alone decisive of the matter in controversy. I may state it as being *the general impression under which the volume of the New Testament was penned by the Apostles*. This impression, or rather belief, was this: that the world was to come to an end, and the day of final judgment to appear, before the generation of men

then living should pass away. I say, it was under this solemn and ominous impression that the Gospels and Epistles were written; and written, therefore, as we may safely affirm, but to meet the demands of a present occasion, without the remotest reference in the minds of the writers to the wants and capacities of a distant era, such as ours. And further, neither is it irreverent nor in any degree hazardous to say, that they would necessarily, therefore, be written in haste; and in a haste that would naturally betray the writers into inaccuracy of statement in regard to many unimportant facts, as well as give occasion for the expression of individual opinions which were rather the reflection of the age than the dictate of supernal wisdom. The influence of these facts upon their productions, it would be difficult fully to estimate. That it was great, we have the evidence before us. So also was it as a coöperative influence shown in their zeal, their sufferings, their labors, their patience, their faith, their courage; and above all in their honest simplicity, their truthfulness, their candor. And thus, while they win our entire confidence in their veracity, they unconsciously guard us against the error of looking upon them as infallible counsellors in regard to



matters of which we are fully as competent to form a correct judgment as they were. The principles, however, which are our guides in the formation of such judgment, it is but fair to confess, have been derived from the study of what they themselves deliver. It is by the light of their own wisdom we read them.

Upon this belief of the Apostles, manifestly proceeding from a misunderstanding of the words addressed to them by Christ as recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, the Rev. Dr. Barnes, an eminent and learned Presbyterian divine, makes these observations:—"I do not know that the *proper doctrine* of inspiration suffers, if we admit that the Apostles were ignorant of the exact time when the world would close; or even that, in regard to the precise period when that would take place, they might be in error." And again: "The Apostles were in fact *ignorant and mistaken* in regard to at least the time of the occurrence of one future event, the death of John, xxi. 23. There is therefore no departure from the proper doctrine of inspiration, in supposing that the Apostles were not inspired on these subjects, and that they might be ignorant like others."

Professor Bush, in his *Anastasis*, page 197, then,

if not now, a defender of the doctrine of plenary inspiration, says:—"Acting as the organs of certain Divine communications, it would be natural that they [the Apostles] should exercise their thoughts upon the themes that thus expressed themselves through them. But the judgments that they personally formed on these disclosures, being distinct from the truths themselves, may not have been free from error, simply for the reason, that they did not come really within the scope of their inspiration. The mind of the spirit is one thing; and their personal view of it another; and it is very conceivable that we, from having more ample data, may be *better able* to judge of this meaning than they were."

These opinions, which, I believe, are coincident with those generally entertained by Unitarians, may be very easily corroborated by reference to the sacred text itself. As, for instance, St. Paul, in momentary expectation of the appearance "of the great day," says to the Thessalonians: "And we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." So St. Peter admonishes his readers: "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." St.

John goes so far as to say: "Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist should come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby *we know* that it is the last time." So in Phil. iv. 5, "The Lord is at hand." Heb. x. 25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." Rom. xiii. 12, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." James v. 8, 9, "For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," and, "behold, the Judge standeth before the door." Rev. xxii. 10, "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand."

We see very clearly by these extracts, which might be easily extended, that the Apostles were not men of an infallible judgment; and that they could be mistaken upon a subject of the most engrossing interest to themselves and to the age in which they lived. This is also further confirmed by what St. Peter says, when scoffers in his day, observing the language of the preachers of Christianity who predicted the speedy dissolution of the earth, called for the evidence of the approaching catastrophe, and remarked, that "all things con-

tinue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Upon this the Apostle takes occasion to warn them that the day of the Lord "cometh as a thief in the night"; and, as possibly distrusting his own interpretation of the event, ingeniously qualifies the prediction by saying, that "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Now, while we reverence the Bible as the first of books, — the original fountain of truth, — the only record of the revelation of the will of God, and of the moral relation which he sustains toward his creatures, — are we therefore bound to accept without discrimination all that book contains? Shall we be permitted to make no allowances for human error? for personal failings and prejudices in the writers? for circumscribed views of physical, no less than of moral truth? This would be most unreasonable and absurd. Neither is it necessary to a devout and profitable use of the sacred oracles. These errors, however zealously denied, cannot be hid. They must be acknowledged and accounted for. And when the keen edge of philosophical criticism is applied to them, they must yield to its painful surgery. But this will not affect that which is vital, which is

permanent and divine. This will remain, and the spirit that giveth understanding will still irradiate the page with its divine effulgence.

This "proper doctrine of inspiration," of which the Rev. Dr. Barnes speaks, and which is allowed by many illustrious names among Biblical expositors, is all that we desire to avail ourselves of, to settle upon the foundation of Scriptural truth, and the accordant decisions of common sense, those doctrines which alone appear to us as worthy their exalted source. And it is no small advantage gained to the cause of truth, when we can advance toward a free discussion of the theological ideas of the day, unfettered by those dogmas of church and authority with which they are ordinarily encumbered; when we can bring the question at issue directly before the bar of reason, and there have it adjudicated in the application of those rules of moral evidence which yield to the influences neither of circumstance nor of custom. It becomes then no longer a controversy about texts, but respecting principles eternal and immutable in themselves.

And here a reflection arises to which I beg leave to give expression, although not immediately relevant to the topic under consideration.

It is this, — that this fact of a general expectation of the coming of the “last day” is singularly unfavorable to modern hierarchal pretension. How is it in any degree credible, that the idea of forming and perpetuating an ecclesiastical organization could have occurred to the minds of these earnest and devout men, under circumstances to them prophetic of the near approach of an appalling and universal catastrophe? of an event which every rising of the sun might usher in, and which would wrap the whole world in conflagration and ruin? It is evident, even in the manner of their hurrying from place to place to preach the Gospel, and to declare to every creature under heaven its glad tidings, that they looked but a very short way into the future. Wherever they made converts, and collected a body of disciples together under the roof of some hospitable neophyte, there they established the church for the time being; and, leaving it in charge of some able member, or bishop, elder, deacon, presbyter, prophet, or apostle, sought a new field of labor. When special instructions or advice were required, epistles were written to be read to the congregations. But these epistles were evidently distributed with the improvident generosity of the Si-

byllæ, and preserved to our time by a series of remarkable providences totally beyond the purview of their several writers. It was the same with the Gospels. The Apostles as chief would naturally take the direction of affairs; but we do not perceive that they established any orders in the ministry, save such as the function of the person exercising it indicated. They built no churches; they put forth no liturgy. Every man was left to improve the gift that was in him, in accordance with a sober judgment and a proper regard to decorum. The Lord's Supper was a daily sacrament observed till his coming again, by all who then looked for him. For, as the pious Dr. Watts remarks, "They supposed the day of the Lord was just appearing." What call, then, had they to draw up rules of precedence and government for popes and bishops? What, suppose you, could they have answered, when asked their opinion of the virtues that inhere in Apostolic order; or how far we were to recognize the divine right of a bishop to exercise irresponsible powers? The whole appears manifestly absurd, and in utter repugnance to every thought expressed by them.

In saying this, I am not seeking to deny that

Episcopacy is a historical fact which finds its birth in a remote antiquity; or that it appeared in a crude form before the close of the second century, which the three following centuries matured. But I have not the most distant belief in its Apostolic appointment,—much less in any authority peculiar to it, save such as it derives from the consent of congregations and conventions. Had the Apostles been gifted with a divine prescience which beheld the Church in her future array as she appeared long after their decease; had they been able to descry the abuses of power, the corruptions, the licentiousness, the superstition, that distracted and deformed it, through the agency of episcopal pretension,—surely they would never have delegated their authority to a bishop.

Nor would I wish to be understood in these remarks to undervalue the episcopal form of church government, as an efficient and highly commendable polity. On the contrary, I admire it, where a bishop comports himself with meekness and Christian humility; and I could wish to see it adopted among Unitarians, as a means of consolidating and giving a consistent action to their different churches. But the bishop should be held to as strict an accountability to his people, as



a political officer is to his constituency; and he should be made to feel that he held no authority by divine right, but by republican suffrage. A bishop and a liturgy, — a splendid ritual and a simple faith, — are what, above all things, I desire to see in a church. These, while they would give strength and efficient action to the ecclesiastical body, and thereby assist its progress, would also offer to the mind and heart attractions promotive of personal devotion, and solemnize our hours of public worship. Indeed, they would soon become to us occasions of the most pleasurable feelings, and wed our affections to the Church as to the common mother of our religious experiences.

It is the narrow creed, the unbending bigotry, the clerical pretension, the idolatrous reverence for rites, that repels and offends.

Before closing this letter, allow me to refer you to the last production of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the philosopher and poet, entitled "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit"; a little volume devoted entirely to the discussion of this question of plenary inspiration. The latter years of Coleridge's life were distinguished by a tone of piety characteristic of his ardent nature; and by

a strict adherence to the tenets of the Episcopal Church in England. He was in every thing orthodox, save upon this one question, which his critical judgment indignantly discarded as "superstitious and unscriptural."

It would be drawing too largely upon your patience to present you with extracts from this work. Indeed, this could not well be done without breaking in upon the continuity of the argument, and requiring of me a running commentary to present it in its completeness, which would occupy too much space. In his sixth letter, he remarks:—"But I am weary of discussing a tenet, which the generality of divines and the leaders of the religious public have ceased to defend, and yet continue to assert or imply. The tendency manifested in this conduct, the spirit of this and the preceding century, on which, not indeed the tenet itself, *but the obstinate adherence to it against the clearest light of reason and experience*, is grounded,—this it is which, according to my conviction, gives the venom to the error, and justifies the attempt to substitute a juster view."

It is indeed a remarkable fact, that, in this country no less than in England, this doctrine of a plenary inspiration is affirmed by men of ortho-

dox persuasions, whose learning and talents give us every reason to suspect, not their judgment, but their sincerity. Their sincerity, not as men of religious sentiments and belief, but as scholars; and as being too timid to brave the consequences of an open avowal of what they confess to themselves in the secrecy and quiet of their own studies. In this I believe them to be honest in their views of what is best for the religious world; and that, in practising this reservation, they are actuated by the best of motives. But a doctrine which requires such a sacrifice for its support, had better come to the ground at once. On this point Coleridge remarks, in his fourth letter:—"Such, for instance, are the arguments drawn from the anticipated loss and damage that would result from its abandonment [the doctrine of plenary inspiration];—as that it would deprive the Christian world of its only infallible arbiter in questions of faith and duty, suppress the only common and inappealable tribunal; that the Bible is the only religious bond of union and ground of unity among Protestants; and the like. For the confutation of this whole reasoning, it might be sufficient to ask:—Has it produced these effects? Would not the contrary statement be nearer to the fact? What

did the churches of the first four centuries hold upon this point? To what did they attribute the rise and multiplication of heresies? 'Can any learned and candid Protestant affirm that there existed and exists no ground for the charges of Bossuet and other eminent Romish divines?'"

The time will come, doubtless, when this tenet must be abandoned; but it will result in the abandonment of orthodoxy with it. For as both stand together from mutual support, so will both fall, and thus pull each other down.

## LETTER IV.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

I DOUBT that you will find a man willing to affirm that the Apostles were Trinitarians; that is to say, that this concrete idea of a tripartite Divinity ever had an existence in their minds, as the modern Trinitarian apprehends it. You may say, that you find the component parts of such an idea in their writings, and that you have but to bring them together to exhibit the fact. But it seems to me that this is merely begging the question. For it is not whether they denominated those three personalities, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each separately a divine person; but whether they ever conceived of them collectively as one God. Now I think it is not affirming too much to say, that they never did so conceive of them. For, if they had, it would have been with them a

cardinal doctrine, as it is with you, and they would so have stated it. It is quite impossible that they could have failed to do so. Could it have been of less importance in their view of it than in yours? Surely you will not say so. Why, then, do we not find it expressed? And you, Bible Christians, why do you make that doctrine a condition of membership in your churches, which is not so expressed in the Bible? I think in this you exceed your commission, and are guilty of a gross contradiction. Rome has a right to do so, because she does not receive the Bible as a rule of faith. Do be consistent, and declare your infallibility, and then you may impose what articles of belief you please, nor trouble yourself about Scriptural authority.

I have said that the Apostles were not Trinitarians. For if they had been, they would not only have said so themselves, but the Church would not have been compelled to wait until the fourth century to hear of it. And I say this now specially in reference to what you call the third person in the Trinity; that is, the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit. Now, although the Holy Spirit is often spoken of in a personal sense in our translation, it is still always as a procession or influ-

ence; never as a God. Neither is worship ever offered it. When Peter said to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" and then added, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God," he did not by this imply that the Holy Ghost was a personal god. For one person might say to another, with perfect propriety, Why do you speak against the rays of light? you do not speak against a toreh, but the sun; and yet nobody would misunderstand him to mean that the light that proceeded from the sun was substantially the sun itself, but only its influence. The Holy Spirit is often spoken of without an expressed reference to God; but it is still obviously in a secondary sense, — as his spirit. So is it spoken of as the spirit of Christ; but impliedly, at least, as proceeding from the Father through the Son. "For God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him." Now Christ was but the agent of this influence. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor," said Jesus, applying the words of Isaiah to himself. So was he "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness," &c. So we are told that "God is a spirit"; from which we must conclude that the Holy Spirit is his

spirit, — is himself, — not a separate personality. God is one, and there is none other. His spirit is present everywhere; that is, God is omnipresent. Is there any other divine spirit but the spirit of God? I doubt that you will dare to say, Yes. There is no Holy Ghost constituting a third person in the Trinity. It is superfluous. It is an entire misconception.

It does not signify that Jesus tells his disciples that he will pray the Father to send the Comforter, the Paraclete, or Holy Spirit unto them, more than that God will specially visit them with his divine spirit; that is, he being himself a spirit, will descend upon them, &c. To imply more than this, is to affirm a polytheism as gross as the Greek or Roman. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord."

It can hardly be necessary to say, that the words found in 1 John v. 7 are spurious, — interpolations, made by the hand of some Trinitarian more zealous than wise; for to resort to such a trick to support a dogma is equivalent to the confession that it could find no countenance in the genuine portions of the Scriptures. In old editions of the Bible these passages were inclosed in brackets, as doubtful. Now the brackets are omit-



ted, and the words are set as a trap for the ignorant. This is not right; and is doubly wrong in a follower of Christ.

And now in regard to the divinity of Christ, as the second person of the Trinity. That Christ was a divine person, I will readily grant. So, also, will I agree with you in affirming his pre-existence; and accept the offices ascribed to him as Redeemer, Mediator, Saviour, &c. I find no difficulty in doing this; but I do find a difficulty quite insuperable in the way of receiving your dogma respecting his identity with God. Here we separate; but to meet again upon another fact,—that Christ was an object of worship to some, if not to all, of the Apostles, and to the ante-Nicene Christians. But he was worshipped, not as God, but as *a god*. In this distinction we may find a solution of our theological difficulties. I will now offer a few reflections upon it.

The age in which Christ appeared upon earth, you very well know, was an age of hero-worship. Men were not then very particular in regard to whom they paid divine honors, provided they were men of mark in the world; especially if they were celebrated for deeds of military prowess,—for great wisdom or civic virtues. Thus the emperors of

Rome were generally deified in those days, and their images set up in some of the provinces, to which offerings were made. Indeed, it may be doubted whether there was a nation upon earth, at that time, in which hero-worship was not practised, if we except the Jews, who, in some respects, were but little better. The literature and philosophy of the age were imbued with the same spirit. It was everywhere, and in all men's minds; so much so, that the Jewish faith was called *atheism*, because it recognized but one Supreme Being to whom worship was exclusively due. Nor were the greatest minds of the day free from this superstition. It was not merely the unlearned, but the orator, the poet, the historian, the statesman, who accepted the popular mythology and the "doctrines of demons." The New Testament itself furnishes us with evidence of this prevalent disposition; for we find that even Cornelius the centurion, a man approved of God, and from whom we should have expected better things, when Peter entered his house, fell down at his feet and worshipped him. Whereupon Peter raised him up, and found it necessary to say to him,—"Stand up; I myself also am a man." So when St. Paul cured the impotent man at Lystra, the people

cried out that he and Barnabas were gods, and they were about "to do sacrifice unto them," when the Apostles with much difficulty restrained them.

Hence, that, under these circumstances, Christ should have been worshipped by his disciples, is not at all remarkable. He was, in every respect, superior to the heroes and divinities of the pagan world, even allowing these to have been all that they were claimed to be. And, for this reason alone, I should say it were wonderful if he had not been so worshipped. Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, and Lucian, in his life of Peregrina, affirm that he was. And so notorious must this have been, that Tiberius proposed to the Roman Senate to enroll him among the number of the gods then in the Pantheon. Lampridius informs us, that the Emperor Alexander Severus had a chapel in which were the images of Apollonius, Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus, whom he regarded as gods.

The disputed passage in Josephus, when properly regarded, must add force to these remarks that Christ was regarded as *a god*; for, were it true that the writer recognized him as the Messiah, it would have been impossible for him not to have enrolled himself among his followers. The words, "This was the Christ," (Ὁ Χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν,) are

doubtless an interpolation; for the same writer in another place says, speaking of James, that he was "the brother of Jesus, who is *called* Christ." Now, to justify this conclusion, we have but to quote what he says in the first sentence of this passage:—"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, *if it be lawful to call him a man.*" What else could he call him, while denying him to be the Messiah, but a god? I am quite satisfied that such was the writer's opinion. So the accusations brought against the Christians by Celsus and Porphyry were, not that they were Trinitarians, but worshippers of Christ as *a god*. The disquisitions of Origen, whose opinions respecting the person of Christ seem to have been very unsettled, — as were those of all the ante-Nicene fathers, — would lead us to suppose that he looked upon him rather as a separate Divinity than as one with the Father; rather, in the language of Justin Martyr, as a "second god." And this would seem to be a necessary consequence of the absence among them of the Trinitarian idea. They worshipped Christ. They could not worship him in a way of which they had not, *as yet*, any settled notion. Hence, they could worship him only as *a god*. No matter under what *name* this wor-

ship was addressed to him; whether as the *word*, the *son*, the *wisdom*, the *flower* or *splendor*, of the Supreme Creator; it was not as to an equal with him,—it was not as to one of a tripartite Divinity. This is abundantly evident.

Now it seems to me, that, if we will carry this idea with us into the perusal of the Epistles found in the New Testament, we shall find no difficulty in discovering it to have been that of the Apostles. Christ is indeed a divine person, but always in subordination to God,—inferior,—the *man* whom he hath appointed to be lord over all things,—the head of the Church, &c., &c.

Again, considering that the Apostles were Jews, it would be doing violence to their characters to believe that they could ever have been persuaded to accept of another person as the equal of Jehovah. They might, and beyond question did, believe in the existence of inferior divinities,—other gods,—but not as they believed in the Lord God of Israel. We say this, because it is abundantly evident that such was the belief of some of the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures. As, for instance, we find Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, saying to the latter, Exodus xviii. 11, “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods [Elo-

him]; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them." So in Exodus xxii. 28, "Thou shalt not revile the gods [Elohim], nor curse the ruler of thy people." So in Psalm xcvi. 7, in which they are contrasted with idols, "Confounded be all they that serve graven images, and boast themselves of idols; worship him, all ye gods [Elohim]." And the witch of Endor—whose language goes to prove, if nothing more, the existence of the popular notion—says to Saul, "I saw gods [Elohim] ascending out of the earth." And in many other places.

Indeed, let any intelligent person, without prepossessions in regard to the subject, read through the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and I am persuaded that, whatever may be the estimate he shall form of the character of Jesus, he will by no means regard him as God Almighty. So, let him go through the Epistles, and the impression will be the same; save in this respect, that he will recognize in the writers a degree of veneration for the person of Jesus that may, or may not, appear to him like worship.

But let us offer a few remarks more in regard to the character of one of these writers,—St. Paul. Now it is in his writings that Trinitarians think

they find the most conclusive proofs of their doctrine. The Gospels, though affording many passages of apparent strength, can more readily be disposed of, by a fair comparison with other portions of the text; but the Epistles of St. Paul are their armory and treasure-house. Let us then examine the character of St. Paul, and see how far he is entitled to the surrender of our reason upon this point.

That he was a man of warm temperament, lively imagination, and great activity both of mind and body, is quite apparent in what he has written, as well as in what is said of him in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. His zeal, his eloquence, his learning, his courage, his faith, his deep, fervent piety,—all these mark him for a man as great as he was good. But he had his faults, notwithstanding; and he is not ashamed to confess them. He was not always equal. He was sometimes overborne by a consciousness of his own feebleness, of the unprepossessing style of his appearance, by his stammering speech,—and he appeared before his audiences “in fear and much trembling.” He was also at times exceedingly timid. He took Timothy, and circumcised him, contrary to his own convictions, “for fear of the

Jews." He was superstitious; he shaved his head and went up to the temple, after he had said repeatedly and expressly, that "Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believed," and that the temple services were not only obsolete, but nugatory, and therefore virtually forbidden the Christian. He preached baptism for the dead, which Dr. Rückert, an orthodox divine, pronounces a "pernicious superstition," which, although incontestably the doctrine of the St. Paul of that age, would not receive the assent of "an ideal Paul, indeed, with the cultivation of the nineteenth century." He was, likewise, as we should naturally expect in a man of his enthusiasm, given occasionally to exaggeration. Take, as an instance, his declaration that he could wish himself "accursed from Christ," for his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh. A most extraordinary expression, were it even confined to a person making no claims to inspiration. *Extravagant* is the term we should apply to it, whatever might be the state of excited feeling under which it was spoken. Least of all would we refer it to the dictation of the Holy Spirit.

Regarded as a man of this character, was St. Paul a person likely to remain unaffected by the



current opinions and belief of his day? It seems to me that he was not. He was bred to the Jewish law, as that law was then taught, embracing many superstitious notions,—many things which, though found in the Talmudists, were not strictly Scriptural. He was also taught in the learning of the Greeks and Romans. He was a Roman citizen; and it would be expecting too much from a man of his warm temperament and discursive intellect, to suppose that he had never become imbued with the philosophy, had never been animated by the beautiful poetic fictions, or his imagination and feelings never led away by the contagious influences of the social and literary tastes of that period. The very atmosphere in which he moved had been peopled with imaginary deities; the rivers, the woods, the groves, the grottos, the fountains, the hills, — all had their divinities; and the constellations in the heavens were parcelled out among those superior beings who controlled the destinies of men and nations. St. Paul was not only aware of these facts, but they had formed part of that mental nutriment by which his mind grew to maturity. And now, in his manhood,—though converted to Christianity,—though no longer *reverencing* idle superstitions,—he might

not have been an entire unbeliever in the existence of those fabulous deities. The whole world believed in them,—and most of that world worshipped them. But a man might have been a Christian and, at the same time, have entertained no more doubt of their reality than Cotton Mather or Chief Justice Hale did of the existence of witches and the practice of witchcraft. Nor do we any more impugn the sound mind, the logical acuteness, the true piety and religious character of St. Paul, in thus speaking of him as a believer in these mythological personages. It only showed that, upon this subject, at least, his knowledge was neither exact nor certain. Indeed, in a superstitious age we rarely find men of the loftiest intellects entirely free from superstitious ideas. Besides, our knowledge is so uncertain in regard to every thing that lies beyond the recognition of the senses, that what to believe or what to reject, it is impossible for us to determine. Because many men “make up their minds” upon these subjects, it does not follow that they make them up by any given data. They often do so dogmatically and by presumption. They know no more than others.

Now take the passage contained in the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses of the eighth chapter of the

First Epistle to the Corinthians, and see if you do not recognize in St. Paul this belief:—

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”

Now you will observe that he makes a marked distinction between an idol, which is but a graven image, εἰδωλον, and a god, θεός. He says that an idol is nothing; but he does not say the same of the gods. Had he stopped at the end of the fourth verse, where he says, “that there is none other God but one,” we could not affirm any thing further respecting his belief. But he goes on to say, evidently with a view to qualify this assertion, as well as to set his reader right in regard to minor divinities, — “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, *as there be gods many, and lords many,* — ὥσπερ εἰσὶ θεοὶ πολλοὶ, καὶ κύριοι πολλοί, — but to us [that

is, to Christians, however it may be with others] there is but one God." Which is saying, in words which may be rendered from the *sense* of the passage, — "Although there are in heaven, or in the air surrounding the earth, or in deep mysterious places about the earth, these divinities which the Greeks and Romans worship; for, in fact, these gods and lords are substantial living persons; yet to you, Corinthians, having now forsaken the adoration of these as inferior potentialities, there is no longer but one God, greater than them all."

What I say in relation to this passage is simply this, — that it does not impeach the soundness of Paul's Christianity; it only militates against the idea of his being *infallibly inspired*. I feel just as much indebted to him for his testimony to the truth of Christ's religion, as if these words had never been written. Nor am I in any disposition to find fault with him for having written them. It was but natural that he should do so.

But I cannot say as much for him, when I find him, in Col. ii. 18, inculcating the worshipping of angels. To be sure, this must be assigned to his mixed education, — Jewish and Gentile, — for he found the doctrine and practice in both. Yet we know how ingeniously this doctrine was qualified

among the Jews so as to escape the censure of the first commandment of the Decalogue, — they worshipped angels, but in *subordination* to God, not in place of him, or before him. So the Roman Catholics profess to worship the Virgin Mary and the saints. But it soon degenerates into nothing more or less than the grossest idolatry. And so St. Paul himself made a god of Jesus, in subordination to the Father; and Christians in our day would have us worship him. Not, indeed, in St. Paul's conception of him, but as God himself, — thus *improving* upon the original thought, and from a simple polytheism rising to a complex idea, for the expression of which no word is competent.

But to return to the text referred to, Col. ii. 18: — “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels,” — *θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων*. Which, if there is any sense in language, means that he considered the worship of angels a practice which a man was not lightly to surrender to the reasonings of opponents, but to adhere to with a becoming humility in regard to his own fitness for so august a service; not laid upon him, indeed, by divine precept, but which he had voluntarily adopted in con-

sonance with the religious customs of the times. I think this is the fair interpretation of the passage; and it receives an indirect accession of credibility from the fact that, after all, St. Paul's notions of the divinity of Christ were probably those of a higher angelic nature, which God "*made* so much better than the angels as he hath *by inheritance obtained* a more excellent name than they." For the word *γενόμενος*, from *γίνομαι*, here rendered *made*, means strictly *created*; which, indeed, will bear rendering *made*, since *made* in the connection can convey no other idea than that of created. So in Col. i. 15, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature," — *κρίσεως*, — any thing that is created. Now, although "*made* so much better than the angels" conveys an idea of a very superior intelligence, yet, being necessarily of an inferior nature to God, he must be something of a nature allied to the angelic, distinguished by the greater title of Son; because it is not in our power to conceive of such a being, and that a created being, who would not so appear to our reason. St. Paul, indeed, says that he took not upon him the nature of angels, because in his incarnation he took upon him *our* nature. But his preëxistent state must necessarily

have been angelic, predestined from the remotest time to this service and manifestation. His being "the image of the invisible God," was what had been before said of Adam.

But to determine precisely what the character of Christ was, is not necessary to our argument. Different minds will form different conceptions of it. It is enough for us that he was a *created* being, to withhold us from paying him divine honors. And my desire in this place is simply to show how St. Paul regarded the worship of the creature; and, as an inference from that, that his worshipping Christ could not be adduced as an argument in favor of his being God. As to what he says, Heb. i. 6, about *God* commanding the angels to worship him, all I desire to say is, that it is one of those unfortunate quotations which labor under that first of all necessities, the want of an author. We have no reason to suppose that God ever said any such thing. God never commanded the worshipping of a creature. St. Paul may have thought so, because he adopted the practice.

Now I have seen some very ingenious attempts made to explain away this "worshipping of angels"; and they might obtain some degree of success, were it not known that such was the prac-

tice of the most orthodox Jews in the days of St. Paul. How they reconciled the practice with the first commandment in the Decalogue, it is not for me to say. It is their business, not mine.

Clarke, referring in his Commentary to the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel, says:—"And they even allow them [angels] to be worshipped for the sake of their creator; though they will not allow them to be worshipped for their own sake." Josephus also alludes to this practice, in his second book on the Wars of the Jews, chap. 8, sec. 7, where, relating the rites performed by the initiated Essene, he numbers among them the obligation not to reveal the names of the angels who were the tutelar deities of the sect. So Philo speaking of them says, they are "the eyes and ears of the great King." In Tobit xii. 15 we find this passage:—"I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One."

Doubtless this notion of the mediation of angels was derived from the Greek philosophy, and perhaps, also, with the notion, the practice of adoration. Plato says:—*Θεὸς ἀνθρώπων οὐ μίγνται, ἀλλὰ διὰ δαιμονίων πάντα ἔστω ἡ ὁμιλία καὶ ἡ διάλεκτος θεοῖς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους.*



—“God is not approached immediately by man, but all the commerce and intercourse between God and men is performed by the mediation of demons,” — *δια δαιμονίων*, — the spirits of deceased men or angels. So Hesiod, Plutarch, Apuleius, and others.

But we have something stronger than the utterance of St. Paul in support of our view of this practice. We have facts related by the person himself who was guilty of the idolatrous act,—if such it may be called. That person was St. John, the beloved disciple. He relates it of himself, in Rev. xix. 10, where he tells us he fell down at the feet of the angel to worship him; and that the angel reproved him, and bid him “worship God.” So, in the twenty-second chapter, v. 8, 9, he reënacts the same scene; and is again reproved and bid to “worship God.” Surely more conclusive testimony it would be impossible to present. So might we refer to like instances in the Old Testament. But that is unnecessary; what we have already said is sufficient, I should suppose, to convince the most sceptical.

Christ himself speaks of the angels of those “little children” beholding the face of their Father which is in heaven, in a way to show that

the notion of guardian spirits was current in his time. But he in no instance sanctions the worship or even invocation of them. But, as we before remarked, in substance, Christ alone could be regarded as infallible; and therefore it is no presumption to affirm of the Apostles that they were not so. St. Paul doubtless became imbued with these notions, as well "at the feet of Gamaliel," as when drinking at the copious fountains of Greek and Roman literature and philosophy. To look upon him in any other light is not at all necessary to a just appreciation of the great purpose of his mission, or of the doctrine he delivered.

And why should it be so? Does inspiration imply the total absorption and obliteration of the natural character of the subject of it? If it does, why do we see such variety of style and thought among the sacred penmen? Surely this fact disproves it. Nor is it necessary that they should thus become mere automata. It could answer no wise end. And yet a verbal inspiration would imply this. Accepting this, and at the same time recognizing the various readings and discrepancies found in the Bible, what would be the unavoidable inference? That the Bible is not true. But we do not so accept it. The Bible

comes to man as a revelation from God, in which his religious sentiment is addressed, — in which a moral law is proposed for the healthy development and right guidance of that religious principle which lies deep within him, and which is waiting only for the means of expression to utter itself in acts of devotion and words of adoration. If it fulfil this end, it secures all that is required. It is needless to look further; or to affect to find in peculiarity of language, or in isolated texts, authority for the inculcation of dogmas which answer no end but that of enmity and strife.

## LETTER V.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I PROPOSE in this letter to consider two or three of those particular texts upon which you build your theory of Christ's equality with the Father. As I shall in these instances select those which you consider the strongest, it will not be necessary to advert to any more; since this would be to extend these letters beyond the length prescribed to them. Besides, in this discussion I consider mere texts as of secondary importance to the establishment of a principle. It is a poor way of conducting a religious argument to found your reasons upon isolated passages, to be found in a book of the magnitude of the Bible. It is unfair; because it is only by grasping in your mind, as a whole, the great purpose and spirit of the Bible, that you can be enabled to judge of its meaning

in particular parts of it. You must seek to interpret it in its larger relations to outward nature; keeping ever in mind, that God is revealed in both, and that his character must not be brought into conflict with either. So nature, as seen in the moral, intellectual, and social dispositions of men, is a revelation of God's will concerning them; since in the constitution of the human mind, when ennobled by truth and virtue, we may read much of the Divine intention. So in the life of Jesus, in whom all the moral capabilities of our nature were exerted in their harmonious and perfect entirety, we have an illustration of the God-man,—“the express image,” soiled and defaced in Adam's sin, but now set in a glory “as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And so we are all children of the same Father, giving forth different rays of that glory from the spiritual life that is present in us. Some, indeed, living rather in darkness than in light,—but none the less children of hope,—open evidences of God's wisdom and love.

A passage very much relied upon by you is the following, from Phil. ii., beginning at the sixth verse:—“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made

himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

If we are to understand this passage in a Trinitarian sense, it is in direct contradiction to itself. If in that sense in which I think the writer conceived it,—that is, as presenting Jesus Christ to his readers as an inferior deity,—then, though still incongruous in its parts, it is capable of conveying a complete idea.

In the first, or Trinitarian sense, the passage reads thus:—In the beginning there existed two coördinate, coeternal Beings, of the same form and same dimensions,—which is virtually defining the infinite and illimitable. That one of these, esteeming himself to be of the same form,—*μορφή*,—thought it not robbery to assume an equality

with the other,—which, indeed, it were not necessary to do if he were that before. But having done that, for that reason,—and I can't see how the reason applies,—he made himself of no reputation, and he, the infinite, took upon himself the form of a servant,—thus disguised himself,—and in consequence of this deception, being mistaken for a man by men, they ignorantly put him to death for some alleged offence; so that the inexhaustible source of all life—died! Now this is not only incredible in itself, but that which is assumed as the merit of the actor is his condemnation,—thus to humble himself and entrap men into the sin of killing him. It could redound neither to his glory nor theirs.

But the contradiction lies in this, that this co-ordinate, coeternal, and co-infinite being—who in short is God himself—is now highly exalted by his equal, and, in consideration of that very equivocal conduct of his, given a name, and entitled to receive the homage of all living creatures. In this lies the contradiction, that that was given him which he possessed in his own right.

Now let us look at it with what we suppose to have been the idea of the Apostle, and see whether this incongruity does not give place to

something like method and consistency. Jesus being, before his incarnation, existent in a godlike form, thought it not therefore robbery to aspire to a godlike preëminence above other celestial creatures, by the work of redemption he now contemplated since the creation and fall of man; and which he foresaw God would so reward. For, says the Apostle in another place, "for the *joy* that was set before him, he endured the cross," &c. Therefore, for this reason,—and here it appears as such,—he descended from that height of glory to instruct men by his words and life as the sent of God, and died in consequence of his magnanimous conduct. *Wherefore* God hath raised him to that preëminence which was the object of his righteous ambition, and honored him with the homage of all living creatures; *but* "*to the glory of God the Father,*" — in subordination to him. And this exactly brings out the Jewish and Platonic idea of the worship of angels.

If you will examine the text, you will see that there is something wanted between verses 6 and 7, to connect the sense; because, even according to the Trinitarian notion, his being equal with God could be no reason in itself for what he subsequently does; nor for his not spontaneously ap-



propriating to himself all that which he receives as an inferior.

The same remarks will apply to Hebrews i. 8, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c. To understand it in any other sense is to involve a contradiction, — the sense, I mean, of the Pauline conception of Christ as *a god*, or godlike. Take the eighth and ninth verses together, and this will be apparent at once: — "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; *therefore* God, even *thy* God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness *above thy fellows*," — *παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου*. Nothing, it would seem, could be plainer than this. Any other rendering than that which the Apostle gives in his own words, as explanatory of his own idea, would but make nonsense of the whole passage.

As to the perpetuity of this kingdom, we have but to refer to what is said by the same writer in 1 Cor. 15: "Then cometh the end when he [Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." And further on: "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then

shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." And this will enable us to understand what is meant by "for ever and ever." Which, indeed, may be to our view a lapse of time so long as to seem to human estimation "for ever and ever." So that the Godship of Christ is not only a subordinate, but a temporary honor; and his kingdom that which shall end with the "wreck of matter and the crash of worlds," and the surcease of the human family.

It is certainly a remarkable fact, if we adopt the Trinitarian theory, that Christ never spoke of himself as an object of worship; never told his disciples to apply directly to him after his ascension as the dispenser of spiritual blessings; never put himself forth as the sovereign arbiter of the universe. When applied to for a form of prayer to direct their devotions, he referred them to "Our Father which art in heaven"; and made no allusion whatever to the Son. It is fair to presume that, in a matter of so much importance, he would not have omitted the two other persons of the Trinity. Had this been, what men now make it, a cardinal doctrine, the omission might be charged as a dangerous error.

He does indeed say to his disciples, John xiv. 13, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And again, xv. 16, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." So in xvi. 23, "And in that day" — that is, after his ascension — "ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." All of which, taken together, amounts to this, — that God was to be approached in the name of Christ, and that there was a power, a charm, a virtue in his name, which, in the mouth of the true believer, brought a ready response to the application. So when Peter cured the lame man lying at the beautiful gate of the Temple, he said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

The first instance in which he says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son," refers to his present acts while upon earth; the second and third evidently point to the time when he should no longer be with them, but had ascended to the Father. We must admit this distinction, or the passages will contradict themselves, and

leave us in doubt with regard to his meaning altogether. Hence, while we are encouraged to offer prayer *in the name of Jesus*, we find no authority for praying directly to him, in any thing he is reported to have said to his disciples.

Yet there is a passage in the chapter first quoted from, the fourteenth, which, literally interpreted, forms the basis of a very strong argument on the Trinitarian side. It would be unfair to pass it by. Let us then attentively consider it, as well by itself as in its connection with other passages.

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my father also : and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father ?”

Before remarking upon these words, we will quote some others from the same Gospel, and then endeavor to exhibit them in the light of their mutual relation. St. John says (i. 18) : “No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” — *ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο*, — that is,

made known, spoken of intelligibly; not exhibited in an ocular manner, as the first quotation above would seem to imply. So in chap. vi. 46, Jesus says, "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God; he hath seen the Father." He had said in St. Matthew, "The pure in heart shall see God." And these declarations taken together go to show that the seeing here spoken of is used in a strictly spiritual and metaphorical sense. But to continue:—

Jesus says: "And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's, which sent me"; this is in chap. xiv. 24. At verse 28 he says, "For my Father is greater than I." In chap. x. 36 he speaks of himself as the Son, "whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world." Chap. x. 19, "The Son can do nothing of himself." Chap. viii. 28, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." Again, chap. xiv. 12, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father." We need not extend these quotations, and would refer in conclusion to those occasions

upon which Jesus prayed to the Father in words indicative at once of his own inferiority and helpless dependence.

Now, to preserve any thing like a consistent sense in these passages, we must use them in such a way that they shall best explain each other; that the obscurer may receive the assistance of the clearer, and that which is nearest in accordance with reason be accepted as true. Now Jesus could not, after having declared to the woman of Samaria that God is a spirit, and that they that worship him must worship in spirit, turn round to his disciples and preach anthropomorphism,—not merely making man God, but God a man. Nor could he affirm that God was greater than he, if he meant that he was personally God. Nor could he claim to be this personal God, and yet attribute the words he spake and the works he wrought to the Father; and add to this the declaration, that he “could do nothing of himself.” The arrogance of his declarations would else be equalled only by the imbecility of his actions; and even these declarations themselves would not stand the test of a rational criticism.

No: we must take into consideration the undeniable fact, that the writer of this Gospel was very

much of a mystic, and that in him the spirit of exaggeration was large. He says, at the close of his narrative,—"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." So he delights in making Jesus say, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed"; and "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood," &c.; which have been, and still are, the sources of endless disputes, superstitious doctrines, and uncharitable feelings, in the Church. Hence, if we accept the words first quoted,—“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,”—as a literal report of the conversation of Jesus, we should be doing that man of humble manners, meek and lowly at heart, a great wrong, to suppose that he meant to draw to himself the worship and adoration that were due to the Father alone. We must regard the passage as presenting us with something like a myth, in which the lower sense is made to assume the character of the higher; as when we speak of nature doing that which God alone can do, and thus, by a change of terms, put nature in the place of God. So when Jesus raises the dead, or per-

forms any other miracle, we ascribe the power to him; we say, Jesus did it, whereas God does these things by and through Jesus, as he himself assures us: — “The Father that dwelleth in me, *he* doeth the works.”

So also, when he speaks of that spiritual unity which exists between the Father and himself, — when he says, “I and the Father are one,” and “I am in the Father and the Father in me,” — he meant nothing more than that universal relationship common in all men to God, — the “Father of spirits,” the “God of the spirits of all flesh”; and which is affirmed in many parts of Scripture. We know this, because he plainly speaks of it in this way, as when he prays that the disciples “may all be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” And again, “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” Hence, you may perceive that Jesus puts forth no claim to that painful preëminence you would ascribe to him. He does not assume to be God, or equal with God; but one high in favor as his commissioned servant, doing his work and obeying his will, and looking to him for his reward.

There is one more argument to which I must



call your attention before I close this letter. It is founded upon the first fourteen verses in the first chapter of the Gospel by St. John. In this, the Logos or Word is represented as not only in the beginning with God, but as God, — ἦν Θεός; that it was made flesh, — καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐγένετο σὰρξ; that by it all things were made, — πάντα ἐγένετο δι' αὐτοῦ.

Now if the Apostle means us to understand by the *Word* or Logos being made flesh, that God, the incomprehensible, the infinite and glorious Jehovah, was made flesh, — that he reduced his all-pervading spiritual essence into gross matter, — shrouded his ineffable brightness in this corporeal substance of our aching bodies, — trod the earth in the province of Judea, — there hungered and wept, — prayed to himself, — was forsaken at moments by himself, — and perished at last, like a poor, helpless criminal, upon the cross; — I say, if St. John means this, as you Trinitarians affirm, then, upon the responsibility of my own judgment, and in the light of my own reason, and by virtue of that reverence for God which is in me, I withdraw my credence entirely and unqualifiedly from this part of the narrative.

But I do not consent so to receive it. Like St. Paul, St. John had in view the preëxistent

glory of Christ, as the first-born of every creature; or the Logos or reason by which God had created the world. This Logos or Word, the Alexandrine Jews, who were extensively given to the study of the Platonic philosophy, adopted as a personality. Hence, as I conceive to have been the case, the Chaldee and Jerusalem paraphrasts, who were a very fanciful race of men, following more readily the recreations of the imagination than the sober labors of the logical faculty, searched the Scriptures with a view to seize upon every expression in which they found the phrase "the word of the Lord," — *debar yehovah*, — and to render it as a personality. Thus, the passage, "And God created man," &c., the Jerusalem Targum writes, "The word of Jehovah created man," &c. So in Gen. xxviii. 20, 21; where Jacob says, "If God will be with me," &c., "then shall the Lord be my God"; Onkelos paraphrases it, "If the word [*logos*] of Jehovah will be my help," &c., "then the *word* of Jehovah shall be my *God*." So in Gen. iii. 8, for the voice of the Lord God, — *Jehovah Aleim*, — we have "the voice of the *word* of Jehovah."

In the Apocrypha, Wisdom ix. 1, "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made

all things with thy word," — ἐν λόγοις σου. In xviii. 15, "Thine Almighty Word — ΛΟΓΟΣ — leaped down from heaven," &c.

Now, to say that there is any real foundation for this fanciful exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures, is to say a great deal more than, as it appears to me, we can make them responsible for. But these were the notions in which the Apostles, as Jews, were bred; and these were notions that adhered to them to the last. Jesus, in their view of him, was this Word or Logos.

But to find a precedent for St. John's use of that term, in the sense he here uses it, we have but to refer to the writings of Philo Judæus, a learned Jew, who flourished in the first century, and whose works must have been known to the writer of this Gospel. For Philo, who was born at Alexandria, was of the sacerdotal order, and the glory and light of that age. He wrote upon the creation, sacred history, and the Jewish polity; and was received at Rome with singular honors in the reign of Claudius. This was in the year 40, full fifty years before St. John penned his narrative. It would be to accuse the latter of a censurable degree of ignorance, to suppose he knew nothing of Philo; for the Jews of that day were

very curious in matters of speculative interest. And this was their popular literature, as much so as the classical literature of the English language is ours.

In some selections made from Philo's works, I find these expressions corresponding to those of the Apostle. The latter tells us that the "Word was God." Philo speaks of it as *Λόγον ὡς αὐτὸν (Θεὸν) κατανοῦσι*,—being the same as God. So, in several places, he calls it, — the second divinity, *δεύτερος Θεὸς Λόγος*; the image of God, *εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ*; by whom the world was created, *τὸν Θεῖον Λόγον τὸν ταῦτα διακοσμήσαντα*; the substitute of God, *ὑπαρχὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ*, &c., &c. With many more like expressions, which it is not necessary to transcribe, but which were applied by him to this imaginary *Word* or *Logos*. I say imaginary, because Philo lived and died a Jew, and therefore could not have had Christ in his mind.

Some writers, in their anxiety to defend the doctrine of a verbal or plenary inspiration, are so bold as to deny that St. John ever became acquainted with these writings of Philo; or indeed that he had ever read a word of the Jewish paraphrasts. This is saying a great deal. On a matter about which we know nothing certain, it is best not to be posi-

tive. We see the Apostle uttering the language and giving expression to the ideas of his learned countrymen. How did he obtain them? Is it in accordance with the ordinary methods of Divine Providence to suppose that he was directly inspired to write that which he had but to open his eyes and his ears to see and to hear? Moses was read in the synagogues every Sabbath day; and upon such occasions it is not unreasonable to suppose that such comments were made by those who were appointed to speak, as would give form to these conceptions of the *word*. Did St. John never attend a synagogue on the Sabbath day? Besides, here were some fifty years passed by St. John — not to speak of St. Paul — in preaching the Gospel, — in intercourse with the learned as well as with the unlearned world, — before he penned his Gospel. How could he argue against opinions about which he was ignorant?

It seems to me much more probable, that both of the Apostles applied these ideas as prophetic of Christ, and looked upon him as their living illustration. This was very natural. And they were not above availing themselves of the wisdom of contemporary authorities. They had a right to use these authorities. That they should sometimes

mislead them is not to be wondered at. We accord to them a character for sincerity and veracity. But we doubt that they were kept from error. We doubt it very much in regard to the character of Christ, or at least in regard to what were his higher and more essential relations to the Father. On this subject Christ himself was often obscure; and it may not have been his intention that their curiosity should be gratified on so mystical and inscrutable a matter. But they would speculate upon it, and this is the result.

## LETTER VI.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

FOR a succinct and pretty fair account of the origin of the dogma of the Trinity as embodied in the Nicene Creed, I must refer you to Mosheim. That, long before the rise of the Arian controversy, the distinct and appreciable character of Jesus Christ in his relation to the Father had often been the subject of investigation and dispute, you may very easily learn from that writer on ecclesiastical history. And further, that although Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had been treated of as three separate personalities, they had not yet been fused into one incomprehensible whole,—and Christ recognized as θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ.

We know what was the immediate cause of the adoption of this word, Trinity; but to ascertain what

it was that fitted the minds of theologians to receive it and put it forth as an article of faith, would carry us far beyond the bounds prescribed to this correspondence. The Trinitarian idea had long been in the world, and reduced to a doctrine by Persians, Hindoos, and Chinese; and lay ready for definite expression in Plato. Philo, called the Jewish Plato, in his interpretation of the Logos, had unconsciously contributed his quota of influence toward such a consummation. So that it would be risking but little, and no scandal, to affirm, that it was of heathen rather than of Christian origin. The mind of that age, trained to subtle disquisition and indulgent of the wildest speculations, losing itself in visionary impracticabilities and beyond conception credulous, offered a fertile soil for its reception and growth. The compact ecclesiastical organization, with its implacable conservatism, that succeeded and laid claim to a perpetual sovereignty over thought and conscience, stamped it with its indelible imprint of authority. That was enough. It secured its triumph in every contest with reason, and bore down opposition with sword and crosier, fagot, flame, and anathema. And so we have received it, and so maintain it. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"



Still, there have been in every age men of sufficient independence to contest it, and to defy authority in the very seat of its power. So there ever will be men of the same cast of character to decry it in all time to come, and to die at the stake of public opinion, rather than raise an altar to this "Unknown God." For I am bold enough to say it, since the father of Abraham made his orison to the sun in Ur of the Chaldees, till people in the nineteenth century made obeisance to Bambino in modern pagan Rome, there has been no more unscriptural, unreasonable, incomprehensible superstition than this of the Trinity. The Catholic bows down to a piece of bread, and calls it his God; or he worships a painted figure of the Virgin, or an old rag, or a piece of wood, or an old bone, and he comprehends, as far as such nonsense is comprehensible, what he is about: but the Trinitarian "worships he knows not what." First it is the Father, then the Son, then the Holy Ghost,—then all three in one,—then one for the sake of the other,—then two;—then they are three Gods, because they are three personalities; but, frightened by this idea, he groups them before his mental vision in a kind of congeries which is without division or divisibility;—lost again, he

puts one forth as an influence, another as a sacrifice;—then, although they are but one God, one appeases the other, solicits, prays to him. Thus there is a continual conflict of ideas; and, from want of a clear conception of the subject, a distraction which is equivalent to doubt. To affirm in this case may be easy, but to believe is impossible. For to attempt to worship three persons as one God, is to deny the attribute of Deity to each in succession. Or to worship each person separately as God, is to create three Gods,—for three divine persons equal to each other cannot be other than three Gods. It is indeed often said, in defence of this practice, that the unity of the Father is, in itself, as incomprehensible as the Trinity. But this is affirming an untruth. God is incomprehensible because of his infinitude; but the Trinity is incomprehensible because of its absurdity. We can understand how there may be one infinite; but not, how there may be three. Is it any reason, because we cannot grasp the conception of one infinite being, that we should be called upon to acknowledge three? The unity of God is an idea which fills the mind with the most exalted, pure, and devout emotions; while this polytheism breaks up the supreme beauty, and distracts

the harmony, that else take possession of and ennoble the soul.

Among the influences which tended to conserve this dogma of a Trinity, we may safely reckon, I think, those flowing from the narrow cosmological notions of that period. The Copernican theory of the earth's rotation on its axis, and its smallness of size when compared with the other planetary bodies, were then unknown. "The whole world," as it was then called, did not extend much beyond the limits of the Roman empire. St. John in the apocalyptic vision saw the stars of heaven fall upon the earth, which, as a vision, might pass for such, but could not be regarded as a fact either of the past or the future. The earth was looked upon as the centre of the universe, and all the "host of heaven" as inferior in size and subservient in purpose. With this earth alone were God and angelic beings incessantly engrossed and occupied. Its production had signalized the grandest exhibition of the Creator's powers; from the labor of which, at the end of six days, he sunk exhausted into the refreshing repose of the Sabbath; and now its government taxed all the resources of his great mind, and vexed his benevolent heart. Moreover, his empire was divided.

Satan was a successful rival power. He had seduced man from his allegiance, and bid fair to perfect the conquest of the world. Therefore it was not doing very great violence to the idea of God's dignity, to suppose that he might descend upon the earth, in the person of Jesus, to contest in open combat this supremacy of Satan, and to redeem men from destruction. It was indeed, even then, a notion which a philosopher might question; but it had its examples in the gods and goddesses of the heathen mythology. It was adapted to the common mind.

But now, in this age of philosophical experiment and enlarged range of thought, such notions are too contracted for the mind to move in. We have found out that any thing which is philosophically false cannot be theologically true. And upon the basis of this philosophy, and other concurrent testimonies of science and sound logic, we rise to higher, nobler conceptions of the Universal Father. We see his works spread out above, around, below, to an extent we call infinite;—a word which expresses more than thought can grasp. The worlds, compared to any one of which ours is but an inconsiderable body, and which have been called into being by Him, are without number. The “plan-

ets, suns, and adamantine spheres that move unshaken through the mighty void," all proclaim his greatness and repress our self-sufficiency, — even throw contempt upon our littleness.

And what is quite remarkable, as regards the moral influence of these facts upon our minds, is this, — that, while these visible works of Deity thus exalt our conceptions of his greatness, we turn to the Bible alone for fit expressions in which to embody them; and there alone we find him described in that glowing, energetic, and sublime language, as the Infinite, the Eternal, the Father of spirits, which appears like a fitting homage to his inappreciable greatness. We find, also, those great religious and moral truths predicated of him, which hold a living correspondence with our nature. We find the laws which he has given for the guidance of his creatures in the way of duty and happiness adapted in all things to their wants and their aspirations.

But we find nothing from which to infer this doctrine of his degradation, — his uncalled for subjection to the caprice and abuse of his creatures, — which is predicated of him by Trinitarians. We find nothing to call for or to justify it. Neither do we see any thing in the person or character of

Jesus,—much as we see in him to love and admire,—that can raise him in our eyes to an equality with this august and almighty Father. Far, very far, below this great ideal must he sink on a review of his life and labors,—his humility, his patience, his sorrows, his sufferings, and his death.

And permit me now to invite your attention to a few words upon the life of Jesus, in illustration of this idea. Its exhibition in this truthful and candid way will tend, better than any extended argument, to prove to you the infinite disproportion that exists between your tripartite theory and the facts of his history.

The birth of Jesus, we are told, was heralded by a choir of angels, who announced it as an event that gave glory to God in the highest, was the harbinger of peace on earth, and the pledge of good-will toward men. And this I can view as a fitting tribute to the greatness of him who was to speak as never man spake before; and the purpose of whose coming embraced a larger amount of good, and shed a brighter lustre upon our humanity, than the birth of any sage, hero, or potentate that ever lived.

But he was born into this world as we all are, a helpless, complaining child; and although the

fond mother cherished in her memory the lofty presages thus given of his future greatness, it is not apparent that she rightly understood in what direction that greatness was to unfold itself; whether as a hero, a prophet, or a king. As a Jew, she naturally looked to a temporal deliverance for her nation from the yoke of Roman bondage, and may have seen in her first-born son the mighty conqueror who was to achieve it. Her conduct favors this supposition. Still, it is a matter of little importance, and we pass it by.

From the time of his birth and his return from Egypt, we hear nothing of Jesus until about his twelfth year; and we may therefore infer that in this interval there was nothing said or done by him worthy of record. St. Luke says, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him."

When he was twelve years of age, we are informed that his parents took him with them up to Jerusalem, whither they went "after the custom of the feast." On their return, they missed him; and, going back to seek him, found him "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understand-

ing and answers." Returning to Nazareth with his parents, the writer leaves him there for the present, with this remark: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

How far Jesus, according to this relation, may have exceeded in his questions and answers the precocious wisdom of remarkable children of his years, we have no means of ascertaining. But we have this evidence of his subjection to the common laws of our nature, which no interior divinity, it seems, could exceed, that he *increased* in wisdom and stature. He did not come at once into full possession of either, as we might suppose a divinity to do. There was a point with him, as with us, of absolute ignorance, from which that wisdom was developed and grew. "He *learned* obedience," &c., says St. Paul; which implies acquisition of knowledge by means of a practical and contemplative experience. He may have been, and doubtless was, an extraordinary child. And this is all that we are authorized to make of this passage. But it falls far short of what we might rationally expect from the second person in the "Holy Trinity."

It is worthy of notice as a most remarkable fact,



when we take into account the extravagant claims put forth by the *Orthodox*, that from this period we hear no more of Jesus — no, not a syllable — for the space of full eighteen years. How were these long years occupied? From what we gather from the remarks of his contemporaries reported by the Evangelists, we must infer that they were spent in laboring at the trade of a carpenter with his father, Joseph. For it does not appear that a spirit of curiosity or adventure had ever led him to quit the paternal roof. Think, then, my friend, of the second person in the eternal Godhead toiling for eighteen years in the workshop of a carpenter; going out and coming in, in the humble attire of an artisan; sitting down to their repasts, and mingling in the sports and disputes of his ruder brethren! Think of this, and think it possible, if you can, that this is the Deity you worship! Does it not look much more like — though not half so heroic — Jupiter wearing the habiliments of Amphitryon, or Hercules plying the distaff of Omphale? Remember, it was an age in which these fables were regarded as sacred truths.

That this portion of the life of Jesus was not distinguished by any thing to break in upon and disturb the dull routine of ordinary occupations

and pleasures, common to the station of his parents, is sufficiently proved by what the Apostle John says of him after he had entered upon his ministry, that "neither did his brethren believe on him." Surely, if they who had been brought up with him, had associated with him from day to day, and had been necessarily observant of his speech and actions,—if they saw in him no indications of his divine character,—they who as Jews would have been the first to hail with joyful and becoming pride the faintest promise of his prophetic power,—surely, I say, if they could report nothing of this kind to fix their faith in him now, we are authorized to conclude that nothing had been done or said by him to arrest their attention, or impress itself upon their memories as worthy of record.

But I do not intend to say that this apparent hiatus in the life of Jesus was without its inward experiences,—was unmarked by moments of great mental and moral illumination,—possibly by conflicts and triumphs to which none were witnesses but the eye of God. This, I think, must have been so; for none ever rose to eminence or usefulness from the easy and spontaneous growth of their faculties. It has always been, and ever will be, that

the excellence or greatness they displayed was the product of long years of unobserved and silent training, in labor, in sorrow, in frequent failure and ever-renewed effort. Doubtless it was so with Jesus. Going on in his calm, modest, and patient way, a grave, thoughtful child, he "increased in favor with God and man"; but won higher and more gratifying applauses from the still, small voice of his own conscience. In the solitude of his own heart he communed with angels; for they ever hovered near him. And times there must have been, when there came to him from that upper world streams of celestial light, revealing glimpses of his future glory. Times there must have been, when his sight, purified by divine influences from the grossness of the flesh that darkened it, glanced backward into the illimitable past, and his soul recognized its birthplace in the bosom of the Almighty; when the scenes of its preëxistence dawned upon it in their ravishing beauty, and he felt himself transfigured into what he was ere the patriarch rejoiced in the vision of his advent. For he who was the "first-born of every creature," — the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," — may have been one of those "sons of God" who shouted for joy on the morning of the creation,

amid the harmony of angel songs; now sent into this world, fallen from its pristine grandeur and beauty, to redeem it by his "most precious blood," — a son of God among the sons of men, — "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Yet these recollections of the past, often lost in the painful experience of the present, but occasionally broke forth to cheer and guide him, as the lightning glances upon the midnight path of the traveller; and thus lured him to his tragic end.

I say, this may have been the case. It is even more than probable as the interpretation of the mystery of his being, drawn from what he said and did. This at least has been conjectured by minds blest by a divine insight into their own natures, — that every human soul has had its unremembered preëxistent state. What wonders of intuitive wisdom, of prophetic knowledge, of ubiquitive vision, have been displayed by some whose delicate organization nature seemed to have tuned to finer issues than the mass of mankind! And how large has been the faith of these in truths too celestial and sublime for our gross apprehension.

But, be this as it may, there can scarcely be a doubt, that the great work to which Jesus was called gradually unfolded itself to his mind as he

"increased in wisdom and stature"; that it often occupied his thoughts during those eighteen years of pregnant silence; that when "he began to be about thirty years of age," it opened the way plain before him; that he was led, sometimes joyfully, sometimes reluctantly, but ever fearfully, toward its consummation.

Let us now follow him to the banks of the river Jordan, where John announced him to the eager multitude as the expected Deliverer. Thence, we are informed by three of the Evangelists, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. That he was so tempted; but, being sustained of God, came out of the trial as pure as he went into it. And here we must pause to contemplate this remarkable fact in his history.

Now the creed of your Church affirms, that Jesus is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father," &c. Pretty strong language, and sufficiently clear. Jesus, you say, is God in the highest, most extensive and absolute sense. Yet he was tempted by the Devil. So St. Paul affirms that "he was in all points tempted like as we are," &c. What does another inspired writer say? Simply this, that "God cannot be tempted with evil,

neither tempteth he any man." Now, I don't say that these inspired writers contradict each other; they only contradict the Church; for although St. Paul did appear to reverence Jesus as *a* god, he did not regard him as the Almighty.

I am not going to argue this point; for it is not worthy an argument. St. James has already affixed to it the seal of his denial. I will leave it with St. James, only adding this remark,—that I cannot bring myself to believe that Satan could ever have been guilty of so foolish a thing, as to show the Creator of the world "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," to induce him to worship him,—him, the Devil. No; he never did any thing so silly as this. Nor is it credible that the Creator could have been tempted by the offer of that which was already his own. But that Jesus, the poor son of Mary, in a moment of despondency and hunger, might have been so tempted, is not so improbable,—may be considered worthy of belief.

That this trial of the faith and constancy of Jesus was a fit preparation for the work that lay before him, seems quite in keeping with his character; for there can be no doubt that, hitherto, that character had not been sufficiently formed and

strengthened to encounter the trials that awaited him. And even now he was not at all times equal. His inspiration was variable; his language sometimes denoting great distrust of himself,—great humility,—and then glowing with a confidence that assumed more than mortal power and wisdom,—challenging the admiration of his friends, and provoking the malice of his enemies. It is only in a moral aspect that this character preserves to our view of it its beautiful consistency and striking heroism. And yet would this be sadly broken and disfigured if we admitted much to be true that the Evangelists said of him. But this we cannot do. Comparing him with them, we see by their own showing how immeasurably he was their superior. In candor, discretion, goodness, gentleness, forbearance, patience, wisdom, he was so much above as to be even misunderstood by them. Their slow, dull, and clouded intellects never opened to the full perception of his greatness. Hence, judged by the lowest rules of criticism, we must concede to him more than they claim, and much of what they claim withhold. We cannot give Jesus that place in our dutiful affections which he merits, unless we do this. We therefore do it gladly.

But that his tender nature sometimes shrunk back in terror from the cruel fate that awaited him; that he was keenly alive to physical suffering; that he sometimes gave way to a trembling fear, and would fain escape from the phantom that hovered in his path,—seems to be made apparent in various passages in his life. Hear him exclaiming, in tones of distressful apprehension, “But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened ~~all~~ it be accomplished!” See him weeping at the grave of Lazarus, as the scene brings up before him the vision of his own sepulchre. Hear him in the garden: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!” And in that dreadful struggle with his destiny, while he sweat as it were great drops of blood, putting up that moving expostulation, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!” Nay, repeating it three several times; but nobly adding, as if exhausted by the conflict that raged in his soul, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” Again, see him sinking helplessly under the weight of the cross. See him raised to that mournful height on Calvary; and as the darkness of death is gathering before his eyes, and the divine light seems to be extinguished in his soul, hear him utter that piercing cry, that shook the



earth and rent the veil of the temple: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

O, my friend, while we can shed our tears upon the sacred page that sets before us this sad spectacle; while we weep at the sight of this august sufferer; while our hearts are smitten by those terrible words falling from the lips of the friend of sinners, — let us not commit the gross error of adoring him as God. Let us not suppose that it is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth who is hanging there in agony and blood! O, no! this were not the piety worthy an intelligent mind.

Think not, that, while I am speaking thus sternly, I am forgetful of what is due to the heroism, the purity, the goodness, the great soul of Jesus. No; far from it. Have I not seen him on his way to the place of crucifixion, saying, as if forgetful of his own pains, to the weeping women who followed him, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children"? Have I not marked his solicitude for the care of his mother, even while the nails were tearing his quivering flesh? Have I not seen him, in the midst of his torments, turning to the dying malefactor to offer him the consolations of hope? Surely I have. And never, for a moment, could I

think of withholding from him the grateful praise due to his magnanimity. That, indeed, were to accuse myself of more than insensibility.

And remembering how his heart overflowed with kindness to all around him; how he was touched with compassion at the sight of suffering in others; how all his miracles were but the expression of his ready sympathy; how he consoled the mourner, and fed the hungry; how he entered into the humble friendships of Lazarus and his sisters; how he raised the lowly and reassured the penitent outcast;—remembering all this, how is it possible that I should not love the Saviour; or marvel at his simple followers making a god of him; or even at the strong-minded yet enthusiastic St. Paul, in his moments of exaltation, ascribing to him the form and glorious attributes of Deity?

But I do wonder—and therein wonder at myself—that men should do so in this enlightened age; that, with the life of Jesus before them, lying in the calm, clear region of a rational faith, with all its contemporary lights around it, they should seek to find in him the one and indivisible Jehovah;—nay, nail him to the cross, and affect to see in his agony the pains and throes of Almighty God.

Besides, see what great injustice they are doing that warm human heart, — that gushing kindness of a yielding and tender nature, — that ever-ready sympathy, — while thus, by their metaphysical jargon, they would remove him so far from the sphere of our affections, — they would forbid us to weep at the foot of that cross, — by persuading us that this innocent sufferer was an impassible God! Yes, they would have us believe that the expiation there made for our sins was a theological fiction. That this dark drama was a stupendous illusion. For surely it amounts to this, when it is one of the “ever-blessed Trinity” that dies, and that can die only in a metaphor!

Why should we any longer prate of the irreverence of Unitarians, when this blasphemy is being perpetrated! Come, look at this picture, and tell me what you think of it. While bowing down before this divine-human, shall we not merit the reproof the angel administered to St. John, — “Worship God”?

## LETTER VII.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

IN dealing with the doctrine of a "Vicarious Atonement," I shall not experience the same feelings of diffidence which have so often made me tremble while attempting themes which seemed to involve questions affecting the integrity of the sacred volume. For this doctrine, as I understand it, is a pure invention of man's ingenuity, having a cloudy foundation indeed in Scripture, but darting upward spires of lightning, that dazzle, but do not terrify. I will begin, therefore, by stating two or three objections which obviously lie against it.

And, first, its incompatibility with the declared character of God.

That God created the first human pair in innocence and purity, and that they fell from that their happy estate by eating of that forbidden tree whose

taste "brought death into the world and all our woe," are propositions plainly set forth in Scripture. But that this offence brought after it any heavier punishment than moral infirmity and physical death, I disallow. The words of condemnation pronounced on that occasion will admit of no such construction; and it is a doctrine which receives from them no countenance. God said to these original transgressors, — "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And when we consider that the idea of the soul's future existence is but vaguely and doubtfully referred to in the Jewish Scriptures, that God's judgments were all of a temporal description, and that the Apostle declares that it was the peculiar mission of Christ "to bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel," we can hardly fail to be convinced of the reasonableness of what I affirm respecting the consequences of that first transgression.

Now, on the other hand, what is the commonly received or orthodox view? It is this: that the fall of Adam not only exposed himself, but all his posterity to the end of the world, to the pains of eternal damnation; and that this terrible result could

be averted from a very few only of that posterity, by the Son of God leaving the seat of his felicity and glory in heaven, and descending upon the earth there to labor, suffer, and die the death of a malefactor. In short, that this unexpected calamity of man's defection placed God in this painful dilemma, from which he could in no way deliver himself save by submitting to this dreadful and humiliating alternative. And that even now, after all this expenditure of suffering on his part, but a very few, an almost infinitesimal part, of mankind can be saved, the great body of them being irrevocably doomed to the never-ending torments of hell-fire. Could there be any thing more truly heartless and sanguinary than such a doctrine? Such a doctrine concerning the purposes of Him who is infinite in wisdom, goodness, and power?

But the character of the means devised for this occasion, whereby these elect few are redeemed from this ghastly fate, is another point of objection in my view of the doctrine. This means is, the blood of the spotless Lamb of God; the merits of the innocent sufferer applied through faith to the guilty, whereby the sin is atoned for and ceases any longer to be such. This seems to me to involve a solecism in morals of a very bold character. For it

appears to me, that, if man by his transgression compels the Son of God to propitiate the wounded clemency and satisfy the defrauded justice of Heaven by his own undeserved pains, the amount of the charge that lies against the sinner is thereby but enhanced, and aggravated beyond the power of human computation. It is but magnifying, not mitigating, the atrocious character of the offence, when it involves the sinless no less than the sinful in its direful consequences. Therefore, instead of men being forgiven upon the ground of Christ's merits, they thereby but deserve the heavier punishment.

Nor is this doctrine justified by the analogy drawn from a view of human affairs, in which it often happens that the innocent suffer for the guilty; and that it is mainly owing to the labors and sacrifices of the philanthropic and benevolent, that the unworthy are rescued from want and promoted to situations of ease and comfort. This is purely a social question, and the fact is the result of our social condition, as much the product of our vices as of our virtues. It is therefore a question which is limited to our own temporal experience. Neither is the analogy perfect, and for this especial reason; that, although by our pecuniary means, by our advice, our sympathy, we may relieve the distress and

recover the object of our attention from both the pressure of untoward circumstances and despondency of mind, we cannot transfer to that object any moral attribute of character. Our influence may effect much; but there our efforts terminate. However pure, bright, and even transcendently illustrious our character, the object of our benevolence can claim thence no moral worth with which to invest himself, and stand forth in the eyes of the community as a better man or a better woman. And as for the influences he may derive from contact and association with us, they may affect his reputation,—they may promote his temporal welfare,—they may, indeed, have a beneficial moral effect upon his character,—but this will all depend upon himself, upon his own free endeavors. But in nine cases out of ten these happy consequences do not follow such charitable interference. Nature and habit are too strong in the unfortunate individual, and he sinks back into his former condition of helpless discontent.

Again, it is against this doctrine that its operation is *post facto*. As if, for instance, in relieving the individual in the case supposed above, the charges that stood against him for past immoral conduct,—nay, the very infirmity out of which that



conduct grew, — were thereby absolved and rendered null, as well morally as actually. So Christ's merits accrue to the past, the present, and the future. And the consideration is, in this instance, — not money and confession, as in the Church of Rome, — but faith and confession. It is an act of the sinner's mind. How is it done? On view of all that Christ has done for him, he repents, — he turns to God, and does works meet for repentance; and then the past is forgiven. Why? Not because under the influence of this feeling he repents, but because of the merits of Christ's death. Now I can understand very well why God should forgive him on repentance; and how he might and did forgive sinners before Christ was heard of; but I cannot understand how what Christ has done affects this, save as an *influence*, for which I am willing to make the largest allowance. The view of Christ's merits as an actor in the drama of events must of course heighten and give a practical force to this influence; but those merits must ever remain his own. They cannot be *imputed* to another; for it is not possible for any being to part with an abstraction, or for another to appropriate it.

But, once more, it is affirmed that these suffer-

ings of Christ were required to satisfy the justice of God, and to restore the broken law to its primal integrity. Yet it seems to me that the justice of God was further violated in this condemnation of the innocent. And I have always thought that it was among savage tribes alone that an innocent party could satisfy the claims of a sanguinary code, where the real culprit had escaped. It certainly is a strange view of the quality of justice, that it should demand one wrong to atone for another.

But we are told that the wrath of God could not otherwise be appeased. This is even a worse reason than the other. For if our sins by themselves, being, as they indisputably are, the natural efflorescence of our frailty, be so offensive to Heaven, surely the offensiveness of their character is but enhanced by the spectacle of Christ dying for them; and this should heighten, not subdue, the wrath of God.

Now it appears to me that in no event can a broken law be satisfied save by the penalty paid by the actual violator. He may escape that penalty by means of a legal quibble, by the influence of friends, by the talents of his counsel, or by bribery. But he is none the less guilty. The murderer, whether acquitted by a jury or hung under

the rendering of their verdict, is in the one case as much a murderer as in the other. So is it with the sinner. No jury of divines, no theological fiction, can save him from the moral stain with which his sin taints him; and the only atonement he can make to the moral law is to wash it out with his tears. Then God can forgive as well without as with the merit of another.

Now I believe that we are all under law, as well as under grace. And I believe that the law will vindicate itself. And I believe that grace—which is but another expression for the active mercy of God—will come to the rescue of the sinner, whenever he repents and reforms. I believe that grace is the sovereign remedy for moral ills, applied through this reformation. And I believe that it is free to all. And this grace may come through Christ, through his merits, but only as a view of those merits influence our resolutions and conduct. Christ's moral power is our salvation, and he is our redeemer in so far as we profit by his teaching and example. And thus he may be "formed in us the hope of glory." Thus we may receive of his spirit; thus be made like him, and apprehend "the truth as it is in Jesus." But nothing beyond this. Nothing by hypothe-

cation. Nothing even by actual transfer. For more than this would bear the appearance of fraud. It would indict the believer as seeking the appropriation to himself of another's virtues under "false pretences."

But you orthodox people speak of God's wrath, of his anger, of the vengeance sought by him for his disregarded law. Do you not know that this language is merely metaphorical? That this wrath, this anger, is but the punishment that follows the law's violation; that it is felt by all creatures who transgress the laws of their natural or spiritual nature? It is so called, because God, the author of our nature, has affixed these penalties to their violation. But to suppose that God is angry with the poor, finite creature because of these errors of his infirmity, is to place him in the condition of an earthly potentate, the conduct of whose subjects might become to him occasions for the greatest unhappiness, might render every day of his existence exquisitely miserable. You cannot so conceive of God. In the first place, it would be unwise in him, nay, even weak, to subject himself to such annoyance. In the second place, it would give rise in him to those vengeful and malevolent feelings that are sources of continual disquiet, and

that embitter and impair the mind. This were impossible.

The very first article of your church affirms that God is "without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness." With which, although I do not entirely agree, I am not disposed to find any very great fault. If "God is love," as I believe he is, he must have passions; for love is a passion. If he is goodness, that goodness must be emotional. If he is a spirit, he must be something; and to be something he must have parts, though they be infinite parts of an infinite whole.

If he have neither "parts nor passions," how can he be angry, how can he love? You therefore make God impassible; as, by making him passible, you conceive you would subject him to the influence of the malevolent feelings. And this misconception is the great error of your theology. Hence I say of your doctrine, that it is not of God, because it misrepresents him. You make him an impassible being, and yet bring in all this tragic apparatus of Christ's sufferings and death to appease him.

Now it appears to me, to form a worthy conception of the character of God, we must admit his

impassibility to the malevolent emotions, and his passibility to the good; because the first cause unhappiness, the second happiness. We cannot apply the idea of anger, of vengeance, of dissatisfaction, to any but an imperfect being; but we can apply to a perfect being the idea of love, goodness, wisdom, benignity, mercy, and find in it reason for our reverence and gratitude. God is not only a perfect being, but infinitely so,—infinite in goodness, in love, in the most gracious expressions of all gracious emotions. Well, when speaking of these characteristics, we must predicate of them activity. They cannot be dormant. They are not so even in the creature. Conceive, then, of these tender and lovely attributes of God's character existing in ceaseless activity; diffusing themselves through the universe, inspiring the whole creation with the most grateful emotions. In this way is God happy. In this way is he accessible to that only which is pure and happy. "He cannot look upon sin." He cannot see evil; for that would be to feel it. If he was "in Christ reconciling the world to himself," it was because he was present in his goodness. It was not to reconcile *himself to the world*, as your theology would imply, but the world to him. And when we are won

to holiness of life by Christ's religion, *he* reconciles us to God. When we become Christ's true disciples, and learn to appreciate the exceeding beauty of his character, he becomes our atonement; because by this gracious influence upon our hearts,—wrought there by sight of his innocence and undeserved sufferings,—we forsake the ways of sin. Thus we accept his sacrifice; by his blood are we cleansed, and by his merits goodness is propitiated. That he suffered for our sins is plain, because he suffered by reason of his having taken our sinful nature upon him. There is great merit, indeed, in what Christ has done; and therefore "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name," to be revered of all in heaven and upon earth. It was "for the joy set before him that he endured the cross"; and he has his reward, as we shall have ours, for "he is set down on the right hand of the throne of God."

Now, keeping in mind this idea of God's being accessible to the good, but not the malevolent emotions, we may learn how men of old came to attribute to him the passions of anger, revenge, grief, sorrow, &c. They never looked at secondary causes. What God did by the physical and moral laws of

the universe, they regarded as being done directly by him. And in this way the heathen came to deify nature, and erect statues to divinities which were nothing else but the various manifestations of God's providences. Hence, among the Israelites, when a person violated a command contained in the Decalogue, he offended God; and God is represented as personally appearing to direct the infliction of the penalty. When the person had suffered, the wrath of God was appeased. But we know that this language was used by way of accommodation to their understandings. We know that we cannot make God angry; because if we could, we could make him unhappy. But it is possible that we can please him; for goodness delights not only in communicating itself, but in witnessing goodness in others. Hence our good actions bear their report to heaven; but our bad actions fall back upon ourselves.

When the heart is opened up toward God, good influences depart from him like good angels, to flow into it, to console it, purify, and transform it. Prayer, therefore, is the greatest, the most potential means of operating in us those happy changes of sentiment and feeling, which are the means of our present and future happiness. These good in-



fluences are present everywhere; ever knocking at the door of the heart, ever seeking to become its guest, and show it the way toward the fountain of all goodness.

There is an argument much used by Trinitarians, to which I ought to have adverted in the body of this letter. But it did not occur to me. And as it is important that it should be noticed, I must beg leave to call your attention to it in this place. It is this:—

They tell us that Christ possessed a double nature,—an idea much litigated in primitive times,—and that he sometimes spoke in the character of one, sometimes in that of another; and further, to get rid of the objection that God could not suffer, they say that it was the human, not the divine, nature in him which suffered. This looks so much like what it really is, a mere quibble, a most shallow sophism, that it is intrinsically unworthy of notice. But it is affirmed by men of sense and learning, and for their sakes should be treated, if not with respect, certainly with attention.

Now to say that Christ did not suffer in his divine nature, is to undermine the entire system of a vicarious atonement; and to say that he did, is to deny your doctrine of the divine impassibility.

But how could so great merit attach to his sufferings unless it were in his divine nature he suffered? He made atonement for the sins of the whole world, — past, present, and to come. He satisfied the broken law by enduring all that was due to the offender. He stood in the place of those who had committed “an infinite sin against an infinite being,” and the merit of the deed was infinite in its capacity. In his agony in the garden and upon the cross he endured all that the otherwise lost would have endured throughout eternity, as the just award of their disobedience.\* Else the atonement were not complete. Therefore he must have suffered in his divine nature, or there were no “infinite satisfaction.”

But if, on the other hand, he suffered in his human nature only, — his divine not participating, — such great results could not be predicated of his sufferings. He suffered simply as a man; and no more than thousands of others have suffered. He fell a victim to the untoward circumstances of the times. It was the condition of his humanity. It does not signify that he was good and pure. He was human; and God does not delight in human sacrifices, or, indeed, in human sufferings. Therefore they cannot propitiate his favor. They

rather displease him. Else he is not good. He is vengeful and sanguinary,—a Moloch. The sense of these propositions is very clear. They are what I should call self-evident propositions.

Again, if he suffered as a divine being, he did it to please himself. It was gratuitous, and could have no moral relation to us. It is a fact, therefore, which to affirm or deny is of no sort of importance. He could not suffer for our sins; it would require him to be sinful. It is a contradiction in terms. None but creatures of an imperfect moral and physical nature can suffer,—unless they be brutes. To say, therefore, that God suffered for us, is to degrade him to our level. It is to force him to do that which his nature abhors.

Affirm either branch of your argument, and it not only destroys the other, it is simply absurd in itself.

## LETTER VIII.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I THINK we may see in the institution of sacrifices a disposition manifested by the Supreme Being to accommodate the form of worship to the intellectual and moral constitution of the worshipper. The prevalent idea of the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages was that of a Deity to be propitiated by sacrifices; and we see that idea seized upon and directed in this way to the most important end. It was wisely left, doubtless, to the activity of the human mind to discover, in after ages, by its progressive development, the insufficiency of this idea to meet the demands of a more discursive and enlightened intellect. When Christ came upon earth, this idea had wellnigh become obsolete. He saw this, and predicted its speedy extinction. In the pagan world we venture to affirm that it had virtually be-

come so already. It could not well survive the bold and inquisitive scepticism of philosophy. That it was still practically exhibited among the Greeks and Romans, is a fact to be accounted for by referring it to the common mind, in which ignorance conserved the absurdest superstitions, and fondly held on for a while longer to the form from which the spirit had departed. So in Judea it still maintained an uncertain tenure. But it had been declared by the prophet, that, when Messiah was cut off, it should cease there too. It did so cease about that time. But it signalized more than the death of Christ, — it was also the act of the spirit of the age. And hence we may say, with the assurance of absolute certainty, that, until the civilized world again sinks into barbarism, sacrifices are destined to remain in abeyance. They may continue some time longer in the Church of Rome, which is still half pagan; but even there the light will yet enter to expel them.

Taking these facts into consideration, we may see why it was the Apostles laid so much stress upon the death of Christ as a sacrifice, — a sacrifice which included in it the entire Levitical idea of an atonement, a propitiation, and a piacular offering; — it was simply because they were Jews. And hence we find this idea preserved in the Christian religion, as a

doctrine denoting its Jewish origin ; but which, you may rest assured, is to be superseded also, as well as the obsolete idea for which it stands, in so far as it regards the virtue ascribed to it ; that is, as designed to do, *pro tanto*, what the old sacrifices did, atone to God for our offences. I say that this doctrine is yet to be superseded by a more acceptable doctrine of moral influences ; in which the death of Christ is to receive a new interpretation more worthy the character of Deity.

When St. Paul said, that “ old things ” had passed away, and “ all things had become new ” ; the old things were the things of the Levitical law, and not the doctrine. “ For,” he concludes, “ he hath made him to be sin for us [that is, a sin-offering], who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” For St. Paul held as a Christian what he had before held as a Jew, that “ without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” So that the change consisted in this,— that, the temple service being abrogated, Christ represented the whole economy, in his own person, as high-priest, sacrificer, and the sacrifice. And that this change had the added glory of making that universal which before was only national,— that now salvation was come to the Gentiles. In this consisted the whole scope

of the Apostle's teaching, in so far as it regarded the difference in essentials between the two religions. The doctrine of the resurrection was a new fact, which does not interfere with this *résumé* of the Apostle's system.

Now, what I have to say of this sacrificial system is simply and plainly this, that it is obsolete. It is indeed still embalmed in our creeds and formularies, and cathedrals are built over it as shrines honoring a dead relic; and there are orders, and vestments, and rites, and men to act the pantomime and utter language — the ideas of which also are obsolete — set down for them. But there is no living truth in it. It is dead, and awaits its burial.

Now do you suppose that Christ taught this system? If you do, I do not. His face was set against it. He declared that the hour was coming when men should no longer worship at Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim, — that is, offer the worship of rites and sacrifices, — but worship the Father in spirit and in truth. He nowhere speaks of himself as a sacrifice. He speaks of his death as an event which, under the providence of God, was to bring in a new era of religious truth and freedom; and not as a sacrifice which was to perpetuate the old idea he would abolish, under a new name. The only rite he

retained was that of baptism. The bread and wine were but memorials instituted for a limited time; that is "till his coming again," which the Apostles understood, till the dissolution of the Jewish polity.

Christ, who alone could speak in entire disregard of national and local prejudices, is seen by us through the duller intellectual lights of his followers, who were thoroughly Jewish. Therefore, in endeavoring to catch the spirit of his teaching, we must sometimes deny the words. Nor must we leave out of view the important fact, that, while a revelator speaks to an age, he also speaks through it, and looks to an enlightened future to do him that justice which a contemporary blindness denies him. That justice has not yet been done the Great Teacher. But it surely awaits him.

The death of Christ is a great moral spectacle. It was a sacrifice in this sense only; as it was made by himself to the truth and in confirmation of the truth. But it did not atone for sin; because, on the other hand, it was the deed of sin executed in malice. It was offered by an incensed priesthood to the god of bigotry; not to the God of mercy. The innocence of the victim conferred no honor on the sacrifices. It was their condemnation. How then could it be offered for them and for us? The light shone in the



darkness, and the darkness received it not, but hastened to put it out? Was this a merit in the darkness? I trow not. It was not to those who killed him, "he gave power to become the sons of God"; but "to those who received him." Yet we accord to the former the more worthy deed; or while we decry them, we confess that they have done more for the forgiveness of our sins than any of his friends could ever have been brought to do. What inconsistency!

Now it seems to me that, if Christ's death was destined to effect those wonders ascribed to it in our technical theology, it should have been the Apostles who crucified him, — offered him in faith and penitence as the Lamb, — he consenting, like Isaac, in speechless innocency. Then we might have found consistency in the idea of a sacrifice and an atonement. But to dignify a murder with that name is out of all reason. A judicial murder; for it could be nothing else; — could God be pleased with this! — with the spectacle of an infuriated, brutal mob dragging his only-begotten Son, fainting with terror and loss of blood, to the place of execution, nailing him there to the cross, and mocking his agony! Gracious heaven! how can men be so infatuated! Even nature showed signs of indignant sorrow! Much more should the Universal Father!

But I will say no more, lest you should think I do not entertain those proper views of that tragic event which become a Christian. If you think so, you do me injustice. I speak thus but the better to expose the idea of a vicarious atonement. I would not deny the great merit of his thus dying for us, and the innumerable blessings which the shedding of his most precious blood hath procured for us. They are abundantly set forth in the New Testament. But I would deny that that sanguinary act in any direct and official manner has any thing to do with the forgiveness of our sin. I deny intrinsic merit to any sacrifice, whether of man, bird, beast, or fruit of the earth. So does the Bible deny it. It teaches us that God prefers mercy to sacrifices, and obedience to burnt-offerings. They were mere instrumentalities, to fall into disuse so soon as men could obtain juster and purer notions of God.

There is another point of view from which we should examine this doctrine of a "vicarious atonement," which is this, — as an idea of the Jewish institution expressed in a language purely technical, and not popular, — as a science in which the terms made use of have this diverse interpretation, that they signify one thing to the popular understanding and another to the professional. Now the language of the

Jewish ritual is a technical or professional language, which the writers of the New Testament, being themselves Jews, have used in a technical and professional, and possibly not in a popular sense. But it is, likewise, metaphorical; and, as such, often wide of the fact of which it affects to be the predicate.

Now we assume that St. Paul always spoke of Christ, when as apposite to the offerings or sacrifices of the temple, in this language. As, for example:— Did the high-priest make atonement for the sins of the people? So did Christ, the high-priest of the New Testament. Did the high-priest offer a propitiatory sacrifice? So did Christ. Was this act of the high-priest equivalent to the redemption of the worshipper? So was that of Christ. Did the high-priest thus act as mediator between God and the people? So did Christ. Was he their intercessor? So was Christ. Was it a lamb without spot or blemish that was offered? Such was Christ. Did the blood of the victim cleanse from sin? So did the blood of Christ. And so on. Compare Leviticus with the Epistle to the Hebrews, and you will find the parallel exact in every particular.

Now that St. Paul attached a far greater degree of importance to the acts and offices of Christ, than to those of the Jewish high-priest, is beyond ques-

tion ; since his once offering of himself sufficed for all time ; and now “ he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” But did St. Paul ascribe a virtue to that offering — a virtue which in a practical sense attached itself to the believer — which he did not see in the other ? Was there any thing in what he said to authorize us so to popularize that language as to represent our orthodox idea of a “ vicarious atonement ” ?

Now the doctrine of a vicarious atonement is, beyond question, a necessary adjunct of that of the Trinity ; for, granting the very strange notion of the wrath of God clamoring for the blood of the violator of his law, it cannot be supposed that any person of less dignity than the second Divinity could be competent to make the required satisfaction. The poor sin-soiled soul could not do it. For if God be so greatly exasperated that neither the tears nor the sufferings of his creatures can recall him to the remembrance of mercy and forgiveness, unless he have blood, — for, says the Jew, “ without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins,” — why, then it must be blood of the purest, — of “ a lamb without spot ” ; he must have that which shall flow from the noblest and most loving heart, — the blood of one the least deserving of punishment, and whom it

would be the greatest injustice to punish. And this sufferer, himself a coequal with the incensed Majesty, can devise no better way to set forth before the admiring eyes of men and angels the great goodness, the benevolence, the grace of the Universal Father, than by submitting to this injustice. The unreasonable demand is satisfied by the unreasonable compliance.

But what adds to the improbability of this doctrine is the inference derived from the above fact, that God submitted his Son to this shame and suffering from his inability to devise a better means of reconciliation; and that such was his gratification in beholding his agony, that he remitted the penalties due the broken law upon this ground alone,—the Son's exemplary conduct, against whom the law had no claim.

Now, how was this end brought about? That is, what were the instrumentalities? Men's sins, of course. When this Son appeared on earth, we see how he was treated. Was this part of the Divine intention? It is so said. Nay, it was pre-ordained, that they, with wicked hands, should take and slay this messenger of grace. So St. Peter says. So Christ himself tells us, "that the Scripture may be fulfilled." The act of cruelty and

wrong was infallibly devised and compelled by an irreversible decree, — else, mark the consequence, there could have been no vicarious atonement, no sacrifice for sin. What sin? The compelled sin, that compelled the act. It is all in God's hands; and you make him go this round-about and equivocal way to accomplish his own purpose. He is not content to do it himself, he must make his creatures the guilty participants. He must condemn them for it, and save them for it. This wicked act of the perpetrators of it is the act that pleases, that conciliates his favor. He forgives them the sooner because of its enormity.

But suppose the people of Judea, instead of rejecting and crucifying Christ, had received him with open arms, — had gladly heard his words and followed him, — and that, as a consequence of this, his life had been prolonged to a good old age, and then, dying in his quiet bed, he had been buried with fitting honors. Suppose, after this, his religion had become the religion of that country, — nay, even of the whole world, — what would have followed from this, upon the plan of a vicarious atonement? Why, through this wise and pious effect of his teaching, the whole world would have been lost, — damned beyond hope of redemption, — for there could have been no sacrifice.

And yet I would observe, lest it should be said that such an event was impossible, that Christ labored to this end. It was professedly his most earnest desire. How did he weep over Jerusalem because of her rejection of him! How often appeal with tears of earnest entreaty to his hearers to accept him! Did he do this, knowing it to be impossible? Was he indeed guilty of such gross deception? Did the *man* Christ Jesus seek to win them to repentance, while the *God* Christ Jesus withheld them? Or did he invite them to enter the kingdom of heaven, and then shut the door in their faces? Or did he do this to make their sin the greater, that he might have the greater merit of forgiving it? Or did he do it for fear they would not crucify him?

These, certainly, are not light or captious questions. They are asked in all soberness. They arise naturally and inevitably out of a rational view of the doctrine of a vicarious atonement as a predicate of the doctrine of the Trinity. They do not express my convictions, and therefore I cannot be required to answer them.

The whole doctrine might be summed up in this simple proposition: — God is angry with mankind, and he kills his well-beloved, his only-begotten Son,

to appease his anger. What a mystery ! you exclaim. I see no mystery in it, but a very great absurdity. And the more you exalt the character of that Son, the greater the absurdity becomes.

Now, your divines may bring up before me an array of arguments from the provisions of the Levitical code, and discourse about the temple services, the sin-offerings and the peace-offerings, the pass-over and the paschal lamb, and a thousand other matters of the kind. But they don't suffice. I am not a Jew, and want a *reason*. I am not to be convinced without one.

But a reason, it seems, I cannot have. It is a doctrine of the Church,—one of the mysteries of godliness,—which we are not to look into. So men are to be saved by their ignorance. They are to take the Church's word for it. This is, beyond question, what the Church desires. And this is the old leaven of Rome. Very convenient for priestly power and hierarchal rule, but not for the progress of ideas. Put out the light of reason, that you may see by the candles on the altar. Behold the consecrated bread,—the Christ of the Church,—the one sacrifice perpetually renewed,—the ever-flowing fountain of blood shed for sin ! These are impressive words. But they are destitute of life.



They are the coinage of a system long since defunct.

The relation in which man now stands to his Maker, he has occupied in all ages and all countries. No external facts can change it. It is that of a moral and spiritual being subject to the laws that govern his nature, — these laws having God for their institutor. He has revealed to man from time to time the influence which a respect for these laws will have upon his well-being. He has further shown him, that the spiritual and moral nature that is in him is eternal, — that it will survive the death of the body and enter into a superior state, whither, with a sense of its personal identity, it will carry the remembrance of the past, the taint or habit of its virtues or its vices, which will there also influence its well-being. And his concern for man's present and future welfare has been actively exhibited, not only in those various revelations which he has made through patriarchs and prophets, but especially in the mission of Jesus Christ. But these facts have in no respect altered the relation in which men stand to him. Men are held to the same degree and kind of responsibility now as they were before the flood. Righteousness and unrighteousness remain as distant from each other as ever.

Sin is just as sinful, — virtue as meritorious. For inasmuch as God is unchangeable, so are his principles, — so are the rules of conduct proposed for man's observance. Christ might die a thousand times, and it could not lessen the degree of man's responsibility to God. Nor, for a like reason, could he be saved a whit the easier. It has ever been required of him to repent, and to do works meet for repentance. St. Paul, when speaking of Christ, may say, "There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." But St. Peter will still continue to affirm, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons ; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."

But while I affirm all this, I do not deny the power of moral influence upon man's heart and mind. In those revelations made by God, and in the mission of Christ, I see those moral influences brought to bear upon them. I see important results flowing from them. Because they bring man into conformity with truth. Because his moral nature is affected by them. Not because of the merit of the person delivering the lessons from which they are derived. The teacher may influence, and indeed must influence, the learner, either

orally or by written precept. But because the teacher is good, the learner is not necessarily so. Faith in the teacher may do a great deal. So may a benevolent and truthful mind. But only as influences to good. Not by transfer. There is nothing vicarious in it.

So the spirit that God gives to one he gives to all. He were a respecter of persons if he did not. But men occupy a great variety of positions under his providences. Their circumstances vary greatly. They cannot, if they would, be all good alike. But God is just, — he will not require of them that which they cannot have. If not here, he will hereafter place them in favorable conditions under which to develop their faculties. It is essential that they be good, to be happy. Hence the idea of a purgatory is not revolting to reason, any more than to Scripture. It is only its abuse by the Romish Church that has made it so. They would make merchandise of God's goodness to the profit of their treasury, and to confirm their power over men's consciences. This is something worse than crime. It is a deed without a name, by which its enormity can be made known. They have a great deal to say about works of supererogation, which is but an extension of your doctrine of a "vicarious

atonement," and about as sound. Only they sell theirs, while you give yours away ; that is, upon the easy condition of faith. Well, one is worth about as much as the other. The man that cannot get along without either has not much to hope for.

## LETTER IX.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

As apposite to your doctrine of a “vicarious atonement,” by the application of which to man’s moral nature you directly interfere with his responsibility, thereby shifting the burden of his guilt upon another in consideration of his faith, you affirm another doctrine, that of “eternal punishments.” I say apposite, not because they are not opposed to each other; but because they present two unreasonable extremes, which, in your system, face each other to the shame of both.

Now one of the arguments put forth by the defenders of this doctrine is, that it has ever been received in the Church from the earliest time, and therefore has the sanction of its antiquity and universal reception for its recommendation. This claim I willingly allow; but consider it as presumptive

evidence against the soundness of the doctrine it is offered in support of. For is not the history of the human race a history of its progressive development in physical and moral science? A history of gradual but sure unfoldings of its mental capacity and the melioration of its social conditions? So I read it. And I see in it a development from an exceedingly low point in civilization and knowledge, to another in every way higher,—more becoming man's expanding powers and more expressive of his destiny. The past, as you retrograde towards it, loses itself in darkness, and comes out of this again rude, savage, and superstitious. And savage men make savage laws. They are not made for liberty, but coercion. They are the edicts of power that delights in blood. Of course, the theology of such an age would be like itself,—representing the fierce, revengeful mind of the age. Its terrors for the evil-doer would be physical torments inflicted everlastingly.

Now this is the dark era from which we of this nineteenth century have emerged. We have come slowly out of it. And this gradual emergence has been marked by meliorations in the forms of civil governments; in legislative enactments; in the treatment of criminals; in the usages of war;

in diplomatic intercourse; in social relations; in manners; in opinions; in sentiment; and lastly, in virtue and by force of all these, an effort toward meliorations in our inhuman and unheavenly systems of theology. We trace back these systems as the product of the despotism and bigotry of that anterior age, first promulgated by an authority that has cherished and guarded them with a grim inflexibility ever since.

But I rejoice to say that this age has, in many directions, outgrown and discarded these systems. In the expansive and free pulsations of the great heart of our humanity, as expressed in the tone of thought of superior minds, we see a disposition manifested to let this doctrine of eternal punishments drop into forgetfulness and silence. Every day the voice that declaims it from our pulpits falters in its accents; and every day more ears are pained and shrink from hearing it. This is natural, and, being natural, is inevitable. From disliking it, men will proceed to denying it; and from denying it, to denouncing it,—denouncing it with an earnestness and magnanimity that will mantle the cheek of the educated barbarian who utters it with shame.

This is the view I take of the doctrine as an

historical question. Of its strictly and purely theological character I have more to say.

The presence of evil in the world is a fact of which too many complain to require proof of its existence. Men do dispute about its origin; and out of this dispute there arises a vast variety of doctrines and opinions. I shall not enter very largely upon the discussion of this point, and will content myself with saying, that the existence of evil in a world that came from the hands of a good, wise, and omnipotent Creator, proves that it had its origin in the corruption of that which was good; for, inasmuch as God is before all things, though he cannot create evil, he may create that which by reason of its infirmity will generate the evil. God alone is perfect. Yet he cannot create his equal, as Trinitarianism would seem to affirm; therefore whatever he creates must be imperfect; and from this imperfection there flows this direful consequence.

But it pertains to our subject to inquire, Did God foresee this consequence? and, foreseeing it, was he able to prevent it? That he foresaw it, and did not provide against it, will readily be granted. That he was able to prevent it, none will deny. If he did not foresee it, it was a surprise and dis-



appointment to him. If he was not able to prevent it, he was weak. Now we grant neither of these inferences as true. He foresaw it; but, for reasons sufficient to himself, it is credible that he did not desire to prevent it. Perhaps, in looking through it, he saw a greater good beyond. But this conclusion leads to another, which, however startling, cannot be logically avoided;—it is this, that, in permitting the evil, he assumed the responsibility of it. Assumed it to this extent, at least, that he will provide the remedy and compensate the creature who was “made subject to vanity not willingly,” says St. Paul, “but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.” And, that I may not be accused of undue boldness, I will quote the prophet uttering the language of Deity: “I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.”

Indeed, we cannot get rid of this conclusion. He who is before all things, and by whom all things subsist, is the Author of all things. And the present constitution of all things is the condition of their subsistence. The Tempter himself, we are told, is a fallen angel. And before there can be fallen angels, there must be upright angels. And to create good angels in knowledge of their event-

ual defection, is to furnish the antecedent to the consequence. We do not affirm in this, that God is the author of evil, but of the imperfect beings who generate this evil. He may assume the responsibility of it without being the author of it; but it implicates him in so far as to authorize us to look to him for something by which it shall be finally extinguished, and its consequences averted from those who now suffer from it. It is a sound maxim in law, that he who does a particular action by means of another does it himself, — *qui facit per alium facit per se*. He does not do it personally, but is morally and legally responsible for it.

Do not too hastily accuse me of irreverence in uttering these opinions. In my view of it, present evil is a future good; for I believe that God permits the evil that its experience may vindicate the claims of virtue to our preference, and so augment the final happiness of all his creatures. I believe that God is bound by every moral attribute of his character to rescue himself from the cruel suspicion the presence of this evil seems to imply, and at last to assemble the whole universe before him to applaud his wisdom and praise his goodness. And I believe he will do it. But he will do it

“in fulness of time.” He will do it when the sad experience of the creature shall work out this salvation through his sins and his tears. For it is the quality of a rational, but imperfect creature, to approach the goal of his desires through labor and trial. These prepare and invigorate him for the enjoyment of the prize. He who has never known suffering can scarcely be said to be qualified for happiness. He whose soul has been polluted by sin must become pure to appreciate the contrast; and from the depths of the past derive reasons for present gratulation. Fulness is more than present gratification to him who has known want. To be born into this world, to experience its sorrows, its pains, and its sins, and at last to yield to the dreadful destiny that ends our woes, by concentrating them all in one overwhelming agony of fear, and to die,—alas! what a sad wreck were this of so glorious a work as man, did not that death discover to us, as with menacing gesture it opens the door of the grave, the ever-during blessedness that lies in its radiant and smiling beauty beyond! Yes, in truth, it were else a world to weep over and despair of. Not the creation of a wise and good being, but of some malignant demon who was destined to satiate his cruel dispo-

sition with the torments and groans of its miserable tenantry for ever!

For what else does your system make of it? Out of the millions who die annually, how few, how very few, can escape that eternal agony, — that eternal consequence of their short-lived sins! Sins often committed by force of circumstances stronger than themselves, — often through ignorance, which they had no means of enlightening, — often through pro-genital infirmity of constitution, which no instruction could remedy, — often through temptation, — through weakness, — through guile, — through unbelief. Take a congregation of respectable men and women, of a fair share of moral and intellectual culture; and how very few of them, by your doctrine, can be saved! How few of these come to the communion; and of these even, how few can be regarded as “hopefully converted”! How very narrow your “platform” becomes, and that not crowded. It were a dreadful thing to say, — too dreadful for rational belief, — that ten, or five, or even one living soul, out of the whole history of the earth, was to be damned, and damned for ever. I say that this would be a dreadful spectacle to present before the mind. But when your theology sends the great mass of human beings to this tormenting flame, I

want language to express the feeling of horror it excites in my breast. See how you dishonor the Deity in bringing this reproach of his suffering creatures upon him! See how you take from him the merciful sovereignty over millions of those that accrue to the benefit of his hated rival, the Devil. Nay, you bring down Deity himself to suffer and die for their salvation, and then doom him to the grief of disappointment,—to shed his blood in vain. Is it not really accusing him of impotence and injustice?

But you are not content with saying that the wicked shall suffer;—they must suffer the most exquisite torments, and they must suffer them for ever. The heathen mythology could satisfy the cruel temper of Heaven in condemning Prometheus to feed the vulture with his quivering flesh for thirty thousand years. But this is not enough for the delicate and shrinking sensibility of Calvinism. The poor soul in torment might console itself with the reflection, that, though it were thirty thousand years, it would pass away; and this would rob Calvinism of its “satisfaction”! It must keep it there always, that the blessed may gaze upon its writhings as a pleasing contrast to heighten their own felicity. This is the ferocious spirit in which your creed is conceived.

Have you ever seriously considered what we are to understand by the word "eternity"? Or can you by any effort of mind measure its vast import? An idea which of itself would make the slightest sense of disquietude more unendurable than a thousand years of physical pain. Suppose this earth were made up of the minutest grains of sand to be found upon the sea-shore; and suppose that every grain of sand stood for a thousand years. Why, you might count over these grains of sand, one by one, through this inappreciable series of years; and yet it would not form the smallest portion of time compared with eternity,—it would not be as much as one second in a million of years. And yet the poor creature whose reason has rejected your creed must live out these countless ages in inexpressible torture, and then feel that his sufferings have but just begun.

Do you, or can you, believe this? Or do you believe that there are living men and women who believe it? No. Your whole life is a practical contradiction to such belief. It is impossible that a rational being can believe it. To enter fully into its dreadful meaning, to contemplate it in all its appalling features, and to feel its full and tremendous import, is to go stark mad. I say the human reason

would become a wreck under the weight of such a tremendous idea.

But look at the great mass of people who profess to consent to the truth of this doctrine. How are they employed? What are the ideas and objects that engage their attention and engross their affections? Do you see them hurrying through the streets haggard with fear? Do you see them struggling in prayer with their vengeful Deity, in forgetfulness of their daily business and pleasures? Do you see them going plainly clad, and faring abstemiously, that they may give their goods to feed the poor and send the Gospel to the perishing heathen? Do you see them forsake the gain and craft of trade? Do you see them day and night watering their couches with their tears? O, no, nothing of this. These are the gayest, the most jocund, the most luxurious livers, the most punctual attendants upon fashion, the most showy in their equipages, the hardest in their bargains. How pleasantly they trip along in silk and broadcloth over this living Golgotha! How languidly they recline in their cushioned pews, and how listlessly they join in the worship of their fearful God! And the clergyman himself, who doles the bread of life to these famishing souls,—how charmingly elegant is his diction! how beautiful his

metaphors! how neatly arranged his periods! And then his manner so easy; so moderately warm; so tender and so deferential! But his subject? It is enough, if true, to make an angel weep! But it is not true. And no one *feels* it to be true. It is a mere conventionalism. A barren terror. A mask. In short, a very sober sham!

And now I ask, Can this striking incongruity in faith and practice have other than an immoral influence upon the heart? Must it not show itself either in wasting the energies in fanatical efforts, or in contracting and hardening the sympathies, and generating the most intense selfishness? Accustomed to look upon the great mass of mankind as living under the curse of God, — as outcasts from his compassion, and doomed to eternal destruction; and to regard themselves as the special and elect favorites of his mercy; will not their pity often turn to scorn, and will they not, like David, add their anathemas to augment the disgrace of these unfortunates? This would seem to be the predestined channel into which such sentiments must flow. And then, how dishonorable to the Universal Father! When the poor African makes his fetish a malignant demon, it is a rational consequence that he ascribes to him a disposition to delight in torment. But your theology



makes God the malignant power, and the Devil simply his agent, who acts out his inflictions in the name of justice.

I too concede him justice ; and all I ask in behalf of this world, already articulate with woe, is justice. But he is not only just, he is wise ; and never could have committed the disastrous error you attribute to him. For *his* pleasure, and not for the sport of a Nero or Caligula, all things are and were created. He is love ; and love delights in propagating the pulsations of its own affectionate heart through the hearts of all its creatures. He is felicity ; and his smile it is that should kindle the flame of joy in every bosom. He is mercy ; and will fly to the rescue of every soul sitting in darkness and sorrow.

This is my creed. And the evil he permits is permitted only to enhance the final good, — to swell the amount of happiness at last. The suffering that ensues from the presence of sin is not a judicial infliction ; it is a moral consequence. It will adhere to the soul in this world and in the next, till that soul be purified ; till it be washed in the tears of repentance and cleansed from its defilement. But how long, in that life which is to come, the violated principles of our moral nature are to react upon that nature, let us not presume to say. But surely

no longer than it shall be necessary for them to rectify that nature, — to atone for its offences. Justice will not require more than this; else it were vengeance; nay, gratuitous cruelty. And then how will this human soul, made in the Divine likeness, emerge like an angel from this ordeal! How, with the redeeming thoughts of the living Jesus upon its lips, will it rise to that glorious height of its felicity! How look back with triumphant smiles upon the dark and troubled scene of its sojourn here below!

This is my creed. And it reveals to me now what I have vainly sought all my life, — the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It enables me to love without an effort, — to praise him with my understanding. I begin now to perceive what a boon life is; how rich in future blessings. That gate, around which your theology has gathered the phantoms of a ghastly fear, now opens to me at the touch of angelic fingers; and there comes forth a peal from beyond that wins away my thoughts and fills them with visions of that brighter abode.

This is my creed; while yours would deprive God of even the foresight and goodness which is due to the merest savage. You make him the Creator of this world, with the deliberate purpose of creating the great mass of human souls but to endure eter-

nal torments. For if he made them, and such is to be their fate, it must have been so determined by him. All things were in his hands, and he is and was the sovereign disposer of all things. Accept your views ; and then, if you can, show me a single human being as weak, as short-sighted, and as causelessly cruel as your Deity. You cannot do it.

## LETTER X.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

You appeal from my reason to Scripture, and ask, What does this teach? But the appeal to Scripture is but another way to address my reason; for you expect me to interpret Scripture by the only faculty that can be applied to the work, — and that is my reason. Scripture is addressed to reasonable and reasoning creatures; and if it fail to recommend itself to these, its office is lost. That very authority which you so venerate must give a reason for its claims to our deference before it can be received. It is true that reason errs, and thus often misleads us. But does reason err in us alone, and not in our ancestors? They may, indeed, have been nearer the light that shone amid the darkness of their era, and therefore may have had the less occasion to exercise their reason. But it is not so with us.

This is our only resource; and if in us it be defective, it is our misfortune. We are not, therefore, to cease to exercise it, but to exercise it the more, that it may be enlightened and invigorated. When your philanthropic associations put the Bible into the hands of learned and ignorant alike, without note or comment, is not this an appeal to their reason? If, like the Romanists, you withheld it, and referred them to the teaching of the Church as sufficient, then you might declaim against the use of their reason. But now you have given up that advantage; and if you desire to convert men, you must meet them on their own ground.

Now, for my part, I think the Church of Rome acts the wiser part. She denies "plenary inspiration," and thereby makes her interpretation indispensable to a right understanding of the word. You affirm it, and thereby nullify your own authority; and invite men to the exercise of that license which may be fatal in the end both to Church and Scripture,—because you ask too much for both, and ask it upon insufficient grounds. You orthodox people are building up a power that is destined yet to crush you. When Luther destroyed the authority of the Pope, he erected that of the Bible in its place. He might have grounded his

reasons for a reformation on clerical abuses, and it would have been sufficient. But he must have a pope of another kind, from whose infallibility there could be no appeal. It answered for a time. But it was an error which coming events will be sure to use to your detriment. They will leave you but two resources,—to lose yourselves in Romanism or Unitarianism. The age is too wise for the former; and is fast becoming wiser for the latter. It is this alone that can save you from a blind and blank atheism.

In referring, then, this question of “eternal punishment” to the Bible, as your final authority, allow me to remind you of a fact to which I have already invited your attention,—that the writers of the New Testament were certainly in error respecting the approaching dissolution of the world. This is undeniable. Well, if they were mistaken in this instance, might they not have been in another? If they were fallible men, laboring under the disadvantages of want of education, strong prejudices, and narrow Jewish sympathies, were they not very likely to be bigoted in their notions, severe in their judgments of unbelievers, and rather free in their denunciations? This, from their own showing, was their character; and their writings confirm it.

Then were they the very men to fulminate this dreadful doctrine. It was but the expression of their own tortured and exasperated feelings, wrung from them by the contempt, the hatred, the persecutions of their enemies. How could they think otherwise of those bloody-minded and ruthless men who hunted, manacled, and slew them, than that they themselves would yet be devoured by an unquenchable flame? This was exceedingly natural.

Still, I am bold enough to say that the Bible, in its general purport, is unfavorable to your views. It greatly abates the force of those particular passages you refer to, by its gracious and benignant descriptions of God and Christ. It tells us that "the Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"; that "the goodness of God endureth continually"; that "the Lord is long-suffering, of great mercy, forgiving iniquity"; that "gracious is the Lord and righteous, yea, our God is merciful"; that "to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him"; that "he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy"; that "though the Lord cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies"; that "mercy re-

joiceth against judgment"; that "he is not willing that any should perish"; and a great deal more to the same purpose. All of which goes to establish the fact of God's ability and disposition to save us. And more than this cannot be necessary. If able and willing, who can hinder him?

And then, in regard to those declarations made by and concerning Christ, he says, "I came not to judge, but to save the world"; and again it is said of him, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; that "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law"; and "who gave his life a ransom for all"; and "that he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him." But it is useless to multiply quotations. Christ came to proclaim glad tidings, which are not glad tidings if the benefits of his coming are to be restricted to a few only; nor can we understand why the angelic choir should hail his advent as the announcement of "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will toward men," if shame, and pain, and rage are at the last day to drown in one universal cry of wrathful despair the harpings of angels and the songs of the redeemed.

The words "eternal," "everlasting," "for ever,"



&c., you must be aware, are often used in the Bible in a limited sense ; as, for instance, where God promises to the descendants of Abraham "the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession" ; and to David, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for ever ; and to Solomon, that his "throne shall be established for evermore." So our Saviour advises his disciples to "make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when they fail, they may receive them into everlasting habitations." And in a great many other places, which it is not necessary to refer to. Which fact, if kept in mind while reading the Bible, will serve to correct those erroneous judgments which some people often hastily fall into respecting the duration of future punishments. I say hastily, because there seems to be with some a singular pleasure in discovering any text that favors this dreadful idea. They seize upon and exhibit it, as a peculiar treasure of which they are disposed to boast, without one feeling of sympathy for the poor wretches it condemns.

The passage in Matthew in which Christ is represented as saying, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment : but the righteous into life eternal," — is indeed extremely difficult ; for the

word in the original, *alénoo*, stands at the same time for *everlasting* and *eternal*, thus making the duration of the punishment as great as that of the reward. We cannot limit the one without limiting the other. If now we were dealing with a passage found in a book written with critical exactness and the nicest regard to the value and signification of words, we would feel inclined to grant you that the doctrine you adhere to found in this passage its most stable foundation. But such is not the case, and therefore we must refer it to the arbitrament of reason. Besides, in judging of the sense of a particular passage, we must be guided by the tenor or *animus* of the whole volume from which it is taken, and not make exceptions the interpreters of universal truths. So are we bound in this instance to have respect to God's character, and not so to construe any thing in his word as to militate against his goodness or the claims of our humanity. If, then, we are guided in the present case by these just and obviously correct rules, we must seek some other interpretation of this passage.

I will offer you two methods of construing it, either of which may be true, or not. Perhaps you may say, more ingenious than true. Take which

you like, either is better than yours. First, I will observe that, in all things pertaining to the eternal world, — that world which lies beyond and out of the sphere of this, — a certain mode of expression is required, which, without so intending it, may convey to our minds an idea of duration which does not necessarily attach to it; as, for instance, we say of a state or condition that it is eternal, because it belongs to or lies within the sphere of that eternal world. So we may say of spiritual life or spiritual death that it is eternal, without its being so in our conception of its duration. There are forms of expression used for the sake of emphasis, which may never have been intended to convey the idea you claim for them.

So, in the second place, granting your construction to be the true one, it need not imply all you think it does. In the attainment of happiness by the souls of all living creatures after this life is ended, we shall necessarily see a great variety of degrees in that happiness. One will exceed another in these degrees; and in the difference in degree will consist the difference in reward; the least happy, although completely so, will be punished in not being as happy as the other. And as these conditions are eternal, so will the differences be. So

that we may predicate of these various happy states the doctrine you hold, without assailing the mercy of God.

Apply this explanation to "the sin against the Holy Ghost," which converted Tholuck to your views ; and see whether it will extricate it from its damning clause of being forgiven "neither in this life nor in that which is to come." It may, and it may not. I am not particularly anxious about it ; for I think the extravagance of the passage is its own refutation. In the first place, the sin here designated is obscure ; — it is not, as its importance would demand, plainly described and defined. It is uncertain. A man may fall into it, as into a trap, unwittingly ; and yet it is the most heinous of all sins, and the most sure of the most dreadful retribution. Surely there is not only great disproportion between the sin and its punishment, but the most manifest unfairness, — the most glaring injustice. It seems as if it were propounded to tempt us, as it has many, to despair. And again, why should a sin committed against the Holy Ghost be any worse than a sin against God ? Is the Holy Ghost greater than God ? And is not the Holy Ghost God ? Surely this distinction is gratuitous. A sin is a sin ; and the object of it

cannot change its nature. Whether it be against one person in the Trinity, or against the whole three, its character is the same. Or is one person in this mystical three more vengeful than the others? For, bold as this question is, the declaration suggests it, and makes it reasonable.

So I would object to this whole doctrine of "eternal punishments," that it is without a cause of justification in Him who is assumed to punish. And I do it upon this ground, that the sin cannot reach to injure him. He can have no motive so far to do violence to his love and mercy, — nay, to his justice, — as to seek by a judicial sentence to inflict eternal misery upon the poor, infirm, erring, and sorrow-laden souls of his creatures. We shudder at the thought of the cruel boy who tortures for his heartless sport the insect, or the helpless animal, that falls into his hands. But the object of his persecution soon expires, and its pains are ended. It is not so with your God. He pursues his victims through the rounds of endless space, — pursues and tortures them for ever. Yet he demands it of us to forgive one another. Why don't he set us an example of forgiveness? He whom we never have, never can, injure?

But you reply, that it is a law of our nature,

and signalizes his government of the world, that determines our punishment. But not for ever. This is to carry it beyond our nature, and beyond the confines of this world. To those inflexible and implacable laws which show "no place for repentance, though we seek it carefully with tears," I bow in sorrowful but humble acquiescence; and I look to these laws to wreak their blind vengeance upon my suffering nature; and therein I find my atonement. Here I am "bound fast in fate." But I do not interpret God by these hard, senseless, and unyielding laws. I do not by that brutal analogy seek to define his emotions and principles of action. I do not say, that, because nature never relents, God never forgives, — save for reasons which dishonor him. I will not believe that the eternal world is but an exaggerated picture of this. More beautiful, it may be, but more cursed in labor and pain. With higher degrees of happiness, but lower depths of woe. With somewhat more of goodness, but, O, how immeasurably more of sin! For the few, the face of divine love, but for the many, wrath, and wrath only. No. This I cannot believe. Certainly not upon those slight grounds of difference we see among men here. Far from it. No, I cannot think those deserving of salvation

who are willing to accept that boon in its denial to all who are dear to them. I cannot think that man a good man, who can complacently look around upon the great mass of his fellow-men, and say within himself, "These shall all be damned; but, thank God, I shall be saved!" I cannot regard him as other than a beast, and worse than a beast, who, holding these doctrines, will rush into matrimony and multiply candidates for the eternal burning, merely to gratify his inclinations. Yes, and even a lower opinion, if that were possible, would I form of the father or the mother who would selfishly enter those golden doors and see its offspring shut out. No; the noble, the true Christian heart would say, — Let me share the torments of those I love, rather than sit in solitary security to meditate upon their woes. Let us together lift up our complaining voices to Heaven, rather than be separated by that "great gulf." Heaven can be no heaven to me, that exists only in a selfish joy.

And now to say, that because a man does not hold with you the doctrine of the Trinity; or with the Presbyterians, that of a metaphysical change in his nature; or with the Baptists, that of immersion; or with the Romanists, that of the infalli-

bility of the Pope ; — therefore he is to be eternally miserable, is a most atrocious sentiment. For I can call it by no milder name. It is an attempt on the part of each sect to limit to the restricted bounds of its own communion the boundless goodness and mercy of God.

And what a mournful aspect do such views give to the fair face of creation ! What multiplied evidences of disregard on the part of the Creator for the creature's future welfare ! What temptations and snares are spread around them, in every outburst of generous or hilarious feeling ! How many unsuspected pitfalls are concealed under the foliage and flowers of youthful pleasures, to precipitate the unconscious soul into hell ! What damning power is given to idle words ! What siren voices lure us to destruction in the melody of music ! What gentle and innocent passions, — what tender affections, — conspire to betray us ! And how is all nature set in array against us, with its smiles and glances, its fruits and its treasures, — and all that we may fall into the hands of your revengeful Deity. To what desert or what cave shall I fly to escape these perils ? In what deep cell bury myself from the sound of cheerful voices, — with what exorcisms lacerate and subdue the flesh, — with what fastings



and vigils turn this pleasant life into a curse,—and thus escape the wrath that pursues me? Alas! if *your* God desire my perdition, he will find me out even here. Perhaps he will detect some flaw in my creed. Perhaps I have not received the sacraments at the hands of a valid ministry. Perhaps I don't believe in the "real presence," or in transubstantiation. Perhaps I have not been immersed. Perhaps I have not "experienced a change of heart." Perhaps I have fallen from grace. And, above all, perhaps I don't go to *your* church. Alas, what dangers environ me! Whichever way I turn, I am confronted by some damning dogma.

## LETTER XI.

---

New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

YOU object to my remarks in the mass, because, as you affirm, they go to subvert the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and throw discredit upon the sacred volume. Permit me to say, in reply to this objection, that in making it you betray a forgetfulness of what Christianity really is, as a humane and comprehensive revelation of original truths; which, in my view of them, bear but little relation to your fundamental doctrines. Because certain favorite dogmas are controverted, you affect to think religion in danger, and exclaim that I am assailing the Church. Do not, I beseech you, resort to this cant; but have the magnanimity to look the subject fairly in the face, without regard to received systems. For it is an indispensable condition of successfully prosecuting any inquiry in religion or

morals, that we first discharge the mind of its prepossessions, and bring a cool and impartial judgment to the labor. This is, unquestionably, a very difficult thing to do. But Truth demands it; and she will yield her treasures to those only who seek her with loving hearts and candid minds.

You ask me, if I surrender those sanctions derived from the doctrines of Scriptural infallibility and eternal punishments, which so powerfully address themselves to men's hopes and fears, how I am to influence them. What can I teach to compensate the absence of these? But in asking these questions, please to remember that I do believe in future rewards and punishments. This is as much part of my creed as of yours. Only I do not say, — and dare not say, — that punishments are everlasting. And I might content myself with this general answer, — that, if those doctrines you hold are not true, I am not to be held responsible either for rejecting them, or for the consequences which may follow such rejection. It is enough for me that they are not true. But I will not content myself with this answer, but offer one or two other reasons, which I beg leave to commend to your thoughtful consideration.

And the first and most important of these is

this;—that we should be very careful what sentiments and intentions we attribute to the Supreme Being, and always to precede the enunciation of any such opinions with the questions, Are they worthy of him? Do they become the greatness and goodness of his character? And I think, if we will do this, we shall find but little real difficulty in deciding that the doctrines of the Trinity, of a Vicarious Atonement, and of Eternal Punishments, are not worthy of him,—that they are a libel upon his nature and attributes.

And then, in regard to what may be the best motives for influencing the conduct of men, I would lay it down as a final proposition, that sordid or merely selfish motives seldom, if ever, eventuate in the display of pure and lofty sentiments. The motive not only runs through and animates the action; it defiles the object,—it demeans it to the same level, and imputes to it like principles. Hence Paley, under the influence of your doctrines, could give no better definition of virtue than this, that it is “doing good to others in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness.” Thus making it a mere mercantile calculation. Many of your own way of thinking reject this definition as too low. But it

is not too low for your creed. For generosity is not the offspring of that struggle in which you are all engaged with a Deity watchful of every failing to take advantage of it to damn you. No, indeed, you have no sympathies to waste upon such barren sentiments, or energies to expend in disinterested action. All is made, perforce of your hard and precarious condition, to centre in self. It is with you, as with soldiers in retreat, *saue qui peut*. As for your religious duties, they are performed with a show of alacrity that deceives nobody but yourselves. You must hate the hard service of a hard master, who exacts so much against your more bounteous nature. Love! No; you cannot love that which your creed makes unlovable.

We do indeed see men and women brought into the Church by force of these motives; and they often remain there until the day of their death, bringing no reproach upon their profession by disorderly or immoral conduct. But we look at these people with a professional eye, — we regard them outwardly, — and take no account of what they are inwardly, if true to their principles. We do not see their hearts. We do not see in these the terrible ravages of fear, — of this phantom that rises up before their eyes in their moments of solitary,

thought. We do not witness the daily painful inquisition upon which they enter in regard to their morbidly sensitive feelings, — that diseased conscience that leaves them no rest day or night. We do not see that frequent self-condemnation that eventually breaks down the stamina of their character, and prostrates them in helpless alarm in presence of this huge superstition. O, no; we do not see all this, so true, and so sad.

We do not see the sky turned into brass over their heads, and the earth into iron under their feet, as seen and felt by these miserable disciples, whose lives are spent in a contest with the temptations of natural pleasures and the tyranny of religious scruples; going through their troubled existence as in a round of prison discipline, longing for a larger liberty, yet fearing to seek it, lest it lead down to the place of woe; fearing death with a fear too big for utterance, yet loving life, not because it is lovely, but because it keeps them from a dreaded hereafter; hating the very heaven that, in its cold and formal occupations, is held out to lure them, yet hoping for it to save them from hell-fire; not going thither from pure love of its enjoyments, but to escape the terrors of a worse fate.

We do not see the baneful influences of these

doctrines, that eat out the heart of all youthful generosity and kindness, and turn the warm current of a swelling benevolence into the narrow channel of selfish cares. We do not see how many thoughtful minds it fills with doubts; how many ingenuous countenances it hardens into hypocrisy. You tell them that there is but this one strait and narrow path whereon few can walk, and they uncertainly; you make it terminate in a heaven presided over by a stern Deity, where, upon account of your natural and hereditary vileness, you are received reluctantly and with manifest expressions of disgust, and where, once entering, you find the irksome services of your dull conventicle made intolerable by their eternal uniformity;—and what is the consequence of all this? In some, heart-sickness and despondency; in others, blasphemy; but in many more, contempt and denial.

Yet, amid this wild incongruity, you boast of your peace of mind! You, who are afraid to smile, to pluck a flower, to mingle in the pleasant pastimes of an evening, lest the jealous God who is watching you take occasion thereby to damn you,—O, you are so happy! You, with dear friends and loved relatives going down this broad road in your open sight! You love this Deity of yours; his

worship is your delight, and the contemplation of his mercy and goodness fills you with joy! Poor, credulous soul! And you *can* be happy under these impressions! Well, I would choose to be miserable, — very miserable! Strange enigma, this human nature of ours.

And you think all this infernal machinery necessary to influence men to forsake error and embrace the truth. You think it calculated to inspire them with noble and pure sentiments of religious reverence and faith, — to make them happy, — pleasant companions, — fair exhibitors of that religion whose ways are pleasantness and all her paths peace. And you think to give up this is to give up every legitimate means of reform, and to abandon men to the indulgence of their destructive vices. Now I grant that your principles might effect some of these ends, could men be brought to believe in them. But generally they cannot. Nature is too strong in them. That which revolts their intuitive perceptions of right and wrong can never take any deep and durable hold upon them. You may move them, you may frighten them, torture them, harness them in your creeds, and make them walk in your ways with military precision. But if they are not good, *au fond*, without all this, trust me, they will not



be good with it. You commit the common error of supposing that there is no goodness beyond the pale of your church. You even go so far, in your Articles, as to say that good works done without the sanction of your theology "have the nature of sin." Heroism, benevolence, charity, brotherly kindness, patriotism, piety, honesty, love, honor, — all go for nothing, — nay, have even "the nature of sin," unless done under sanction of, and communion with, the one holy catholic Apostolic Church. My friend, this nonsense, — this besotted bigotry, — may do for some; but — I hardly know what to add, without being violent.

You think, then, that all salutary and effective influences are to be found in your creed, — and in yours only. This only shows how little you know of human nature. Go abroad into the world, and look into our prisons and almshouses; open your eyes upon the tattered crowds whose haggard countenances speak to you of intemperance and vice. See, even in our respectable coteries, the bloated victims of excess and indolence. See dishonesty unmasked and trembling in the presence of justice. Peer into the haunts of improvidence; mark there the effects of ignorance and brutality. See beauty, snared by flattery, lying pale and despairing in the

den of infamy. See the spendthrift, the gambler, the son of pleasure, hiding their shame in the squalor of cellars and garrets. Gather up these lessons into your discourse, and bring them in their living hideousness before your congregations, and see if they will not move them. There are sermons for young and old, about the theology of which there can be no dispute. A present hell; an articulate misery, crying Woe! woe! in every inconsiderate ear.

Then, again, go to the high places of honor and authority; mingle in the busy marts of commerce, and witness the results of honorable trade, — of probity, of talents carefully cultivated, of energies wisely directed. Look around you upon the show of wealth, of elegance, of art, of learning, of home comforts, and see in these the rewards of virtue and industry. Visit the domestic circles made happy by affection and moral worth. And from this field of observation collect your materials for the improvement and instruction of your hearers; and you show them a happiness they appreciate, and motives that awaken their emulation. These are present results, that prophesy to every heart of the future. They have their relation to man's moral and spiritual nature as well.

Nor need you neglect the application of that prime authority, sacred Scripture. The experience of life is the verification of its wisdom. It is through man's living nature it speaks to his contemplative; and goes down into the depths of his moral being, to trouble the springs of thought for the healing of his soul. For man has a soul, and he feels it. There is before him a dim-descended future, whose fearful mysteries he would penetrate, and not drop from the brink of existence into that darkness which is to swallow him, without a light to guide him. Amid all his triumphs, his acquisitions, his labors, his pleasures, he remembers that death stands at the door of this glorious temple to convey him on his exit to his eternal home. Thither his thoughts will wander; and thence come to him those hopes that have been sown in his heart by the words of Jesus, — springing up like seeds into blossoms of eternal promise. Then point out to him the Master who walked this earth, and lived only that he might see in him the present and the future, — the future breaking in auroral splendor upon the door of the grave.

And then, when you direct his eyes above, fill them, not with the terrific lightnings of God's wrath, but the sweet radiance that flows from the

countenance of a tender and compassionate Father. Remember that he is Love, and that love is the fulfilling of the law. Do what justice words can do to the all-embracing affection of his heart. If sorrow, or pain, or remorse, shall follow him into that undiscovered country, let him not despair. There is mercy there for the undeserving. For within the eternal round of his domain there is no place where sorrow shall seek relief in vain. But warn him — warn him with the affectionate solicitude of one anxious for his salvation — against trusting to that final ordeal, so full of menacing terrors. Let him not think that another's merits are to save him from the consequences of his sins. No, he must be his own atoner. The fire must eat out the alloy that debases his affections. Tears, tears, bitter tears, must flood the polluted heart to make it clean. Many prayers assail the ear of Heaven. But the end is sure. O, yes, let us never forget God's goodness! It is this that should bring men to repentance. Teach them gratitude, and you teach them love. And love conquers all difficulties. Let them see how great a blessing life is. Show them how gloriously it opens into immortality. How full of blissful promise it is amid its present disquietudes. How like the garden of

Eden it may be made by pious thoughts and virtuous affections.

And what a treasure lies in these thoughts for the bereaved, the afflicted! How rich in redeeming hopes for the poor,—in pleasant scenes of rest for the laborious! How many disappointments shall here lift up their heads in joy. How humble merit, and modest beauty, and unobserved and silent charity, and patient, injured minds, shall glow and shine forth in palpitating gladness amid the brilliant throngs that crowd to do them homage!

But I declaim. I must be more sedate. We are reasoning, arguing if you please, not preaching. Well, then, consider the influences of your system and of mine, as they bear upon the happiness and moral character of men. While you would dwarf the soul with fear into a mere slave, I would raise it to the freedom of a son. While you would consume the resources of life and exhaust all its sensibilities in the labor of mortification and repression, I would give them the largest play and the healthiest action. While you would put an interdict on all pastimes, all social hilarities, all gay and cheerful converse, I would invoke them in the name of good morals, and say, with St. Paul, that “to the pure all things are pure.” While you

would sacrifice the present to the future, and bring up nothing but clouds and storms from the spirit-land to darken this, I would adorn the present with new hopes, to reflect back the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Remember, man needs consolation, — needs it above all things. It is not power, or fame, or wealth, or friends, can guard his heart from the intrusion of care ; can so dazzle his eye as to prevent it sending a troubled and tearful glance forward into the grave that lies open before him. He knows, he feels, that he is mortal. He feels the dread distemper already sapping the foundations of his health. Youth hath scarcely left him when he grows old apace. All the while is he tending that way on which so many have gone before him. And he needs consolation, he needs hope, he needs the countenance of a benignant and gracious Deity turned toward him. Give him these, and he will be thankful ; ay, devoutly thankful. Why should he not have them ? You pious people will send the murderer, with the blood yet fresh upon his hands, into the presence of your terrible God as one worthy his mercy, because in his last hour he has shed a few selfish tears and confessed your creed ; and yet the useful citizen,

the kind father, the steadfast friend, the honorable man of business, the moral, humane, and benevolent among you, must all sink into endless perdition, hopeless as the most abandoned, because they cannot assent to your dogmas and receive absolution at the hands of your ministry. If this be religion, it is not morality.

## LETTER XII.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

THUS have I attempted in the foregoing letters to give you a succinct account of the reasons which have led me to separate myself from the Protestant Episcopal Church, — a church to whose communion I was very strongly attached, and from which I have not departed without deep regret. But, holding the views I now do, it became impossible for me to remain in it. I could not worship three Gods, as she worships, while I believe in one, — one God and Father, who is above all and without an equal, and to whom the homage of my whole heart and mind is due. Neither could I believe that I was to be saved through the merits of any other creature, — not even through my own, — but by the unbounded mercy of the omnipotent Lord of heaven and earth. My responsibility



centred in myself. I was to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling, looking unto Jesus as my teacher and example, and striving to receive of the spirit that was in him. Neither could I so conceive of God as that he had created a single soul to be damned to everlasting torments for the sins of this short life, in which temptations continually assail his virtue, and the weakness of his nature is preordained to yield to their influences. I could indeed recognize in that nature the sanctions of God's great moral law, and could accept the penalty that inhered in its infraction. But I could not follow out the inflictions of that penalty for ever. My heart shrunk from the contemplation of this enormous disproportion between the offence and the punishment. When punishment is an *end*, instead of a *means*, it can have no moral or merciful purpose, — it is the infliction of wanton cruelty.

I might add to these other reasons. I might say, in particular, that I object to the doctrine that makes *faith* every thing; that balances the chances of a man's eternal happiness upon the articles of a creed; that leaves so little to character, to piety, and the free choice of differing, yet religious minds; that would compel all men to think and talk ex-

actly alike upon a large variety of topics, — see as the Church sees, hear as the Church hears, and put your conscience in her keeping. This I cannot consent to.

Neither can I consent to receive the Church as final authority in any question that appeals directly to my own reason. The Church can never stand to me in the place of God. If she “speaks God’s words,” as it is affirmed of her, it is to her own advantage. But I can hear God’s words as well elsewhere. As to her authority being of Apostolic origin and sanction, that is clearly against evidence, — the pretension is absurd. And if it were otherwise, it should not weigh a feather in the scale where it is not supported by her life and doctrine. The virtues that inhere in legitimacy of successions may do a little longer for the continent of Europe, but here they have died out long ago. The authority must consist in its religious character and intellectual force, or it can command no obedience.

Neither can I consent to her doctrines of baptismal regeneration and sacramental grace. These seem to me like mere superstitions; and in them I recognize an endeavor to subdue the majesty of mind to the slavery of serving dumb matter, —

wasting its manhood in the idle reverence of the ordinary means of physical subsistence. Practically, indeed, drawing down the soul to an unmeaning idolatry. To baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper I grant a meaning, and would receive them as the customary institutions of Christianity, which it would not be well to lay aside. But I see no virtue in them beyond the act of the actor in which he receives them as a sign of his profession, and a memorial of the Author of Christianity. So far it is well and becoming. But the moment you make them greater than the man, or better, you give them an undue, and, I will even say, an idolatrous, importance. I am a man, and will reverence nothing but what claims kindred with the divine in thought and lineament.

But it would occupy your attention too long to go into a detail of the particular objections which lie in my mind against this modern hierarchy. As a whole, its tendencies and spirit are too conservative for the mind of this age. It would fain hold progress in check, and bring over the land a gloom as dense as that of the Middle Ages. This may not be the express desire of all its functionaries, but it is the genius of its function. It lives not merely in its doctrines, which bear the impress of

fierce and tyrant passions; but in its ministerial assumptions,—in its state,—in its pharisaism,—in its contempt for other religious bodies,—its disdainful declarations of irresponsibility to human judgment and public opinion.

Such an institution may be the custodian and disseminator of a great deal of truth,—may, and does, widely diffuse a religious influence. But it becomes at last a kind of bondage to the mind that would breathe the free and expansive inspirations of the age; a kind of prison to him who would gaze upon the open vault of God's sky in the broad field of nature, rather than through stained glass windows; who would prefer to speak from the deep intuitions and aspiring thoughts of his own breast, rather than be the automaton that utters the weekly dole of antiquated creeds and exploded dogmas.

And yet, notwithstanding these objections, I must still say that I quit the Church with regret,—with unfeigned reluctance,—casting many “longing, lingering looks behind.” This, to be sure, is my weakness,—touches of the feebleness that bred in me affection under her rule. Thus she moulds minds to her system. Thus overshadows their intellectual culture, and bids them blossom in pale and tender

beauty in the still shade of her towers. O, if she would adapt herself to the age, how wide and beneficent might be her influence! If she would teach the budding mind to *think* as well as to believe, — if she would throw by her creeds and dogmas, and speak from the Bible, as she professes to do, — how glorious might she become! But this we dare not expect. And the only question we have to ask respecting her future is this, — Is she ever to stand erect amid the assaults of science, philosophy, social and political ideas, and maintain her position in grim perpetuity; or is she doomed to fall, like some old-world throne, by some sudden revolution that reveals the unsoundness of her foundations? For my part, I think her perpetuity is insured by her very conservatism, — her very dogmatism, — her offer of thought for the unthinking, and of just enough wisdom to win the ignorant. The world is, upon the whole, advancing. But its march is slow. Men look forward to a material rather than to a mental independence. Besides, people tire of thought. To escape controversy, they will take refuge even in Rome. How much rather in a church that *calls* itself Protestant, — and *is* Protestant in regard to whatever is progressive, revolutionary, and novel. She speaks to the imagina-

nation of "old times"; and what so attractive as "old times"! Her moss-covered foundations and her ivy-crowned towers belong to the picturesque; and her stained windows, her fretted roofs, her chancels, altars, surplices, — all awaken the romantic in young and old hearts. These are the warrants of her continuance. And you may see in some of these the ties which I found it so hard to sunder. I had made up my mind to live and die in her communion, — *Homo valde studiosus et diligens*. But I was destined to be disappointed. When I had become comfortably established, and had settled down amid my books and quiet, pleasant labors, then, instead of ceasing to think, my mind rose into action. I was like the boy that breaks his toy to pieces to see what is inside of it; and, like him, I find it hollow, — a dark, rude vacuity. I loved the Church; but I loved truth more. I had been praying for it all my life; and when I had found it, was I to sacrifice it to a sense of comfort? No; for even the sacrifice could not procure it. It was past thinking about.

I proceeded at once to turn myself out of doors. And if you wish to know how I felt when thus self-expelled from my long-loved home, I will tell you. I felt like one who has emerged from the

dead and stifling atmosphere of some low-roofed cabin into the broad, open, limitless dome of the sky, with the sweet breath of the morning bathing his fevered brow; with all his energies revived, and his heart lifted up to God in the fulness of his gratitude. Yes; and so I feel now. The doubts and distractions, that, like troubled dreams, once oppressed me, have given place to wakeful thoughts of peace and tranquil assurance. Nature has recovered the bloom of her lost Eden; and the Lord God walks again in her garden in the cool of the day; and I no longer tremble at the sound of his voice, but listen to it, as to the melodious whisperings of the wind amid fragrant arbors.

But you would demand to know what I affirm in regard to the new faith I have adopted. With my denials you seem to be sufficiently well acquainted. This is reasonable, and, to one whose religion is defined with the precision of a *catalogue raisonné* in some department of science, must appear quite indispensable. But the demand is not so easy to comply with. And in my attempt to do so, I can only speak for myself as an individual. Unitarians have no creed; they are better known by their *principles*; and for the expression of these no creed is necessary. Faith in God, in

the mission of Christ, love toward mankind, and a careful adherence in conduct to uprightness, charity, sobriety, and kindness, seem to me to include a pretty comprehensive idea of the duty of a Christian. You may add what you please to these; but I don't think you can safely omit any of them. A man may have more exalted feelings, — more unction, — may profess a faith in a variety of doctrines, — may declaim about his raptures, and make the love of God the theme of the most impassioned discourses. But, as it regards those fundamental principles of honor and veracity, in which we are all directly concerned, I don't think these peculiarities of the least importance. They are his gifts and personal advantages. They may be the evidence of individual worth, or they may not. For my part, in my long and extensive experience of men, they have been to me occasions of suspicion; and I have preferred people who were simply honest, and less saintly.

But to come to the point; I will say, I believe in one God and Father of heaven and earth, who created all things, and by whose power alone all things subsist. I believe in Jesus Christ, whom he sent to declare his will and manifest his love toward men; who was the "first-born of every creature,"



—who was “*made* a quickening spirit,” — “being *made* so much better than the angels,” — who was “*made* perfect” through his sufferings; and who to this end was “*made* a little lower than the angels.” Hence I regard Jesus Christ as a created being, no more entitled to my adoration than his mother, Mary; but securing at once my love and veneration, as one chosen of God, “*sanctified* and *sent* into the world,” for the great work of redemption, as well from hierarchal despotism, as from ignorance and unbelief. I believe in the Holy Ghost, as the spirit of God specially present with Jesus to keep him from error, to enable him to do the miracles he did, and support him under the sufferings his fearless and benevolent life exposed him to amid a self-righteous and bigoted people. The various relations in which Christ stands to us, as Redeemer, Saviour, Mediator, &c., are not of an official, but moral nature. Prayer in his name must be acceptable to God, because it implies faith in his principles.

In regard to the Bible, I have said before, that I receive it as the word of God, in a general sense, to which there must necessarily be exceptions. These exceptions are noted by an unequivocal appeal to my moral sense. I cannot mistake them. There-

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fore, I say, there are some things in the Bible, which, with my present reverent notions of the Supreme Being, I cannot attribute to his suggestion; as, for instance, the temptation of Abraham to slay his son Isaac; of David to number Israel, that God thereby might have an excuse for destroying so many innocent people; the many acts of lust and savage violence of Samson, ascribed to the motions of the spirit of the Lord; the imprecations of David in his Psalms, more becoming the war-songs of a Mohawk chief than "a man after God's own heart"; and many other offensive things, which were indeed characteristic of a half-barbarous people, but utterly at variance with our notions of the Divine Being. So we may say of words and actions ascribed by the Apostles to Jesus, that they are unworthy of him, and in themselves altogether improbable.

Still, these facts do not in the least interfere with my entire and unqualified belief in the Bible as the word of God. They are what are to be expected from the characters of the penmen of that book, from the character of the age in which they wrote, and the common imperfect notions of justice and morality common to that age. Indeed, I consider this as one of the strongest testimonies

to the authenticity of their writings. In their interpretation, therefore, we must not slavishly follow precedent and authority; but the discriminating judgment of an enlightened moral sense. A blind reverence for truth and error alike is dishonorable to God. Bibliolatry is as great a sin as any other form of idolatry. It is worshipping the creature in place of the Creator.

And this is one great objection I have to hierarchal institutions which lay their foundations in a remote antiquity, and claim a divine warrant for their actions,—that it becomes with them a question of vital importance to conserve and perpetuate error. The higher their claims, the more stringent is this necessity; for to change is to depart from the primitive model and forfeit the original sanction. This the Church of Rome well knows; and therefore wisely, though against common sense and in the face of adverse facts, declares herself infallible. The Episcopal Church of England and America is either not wise enough or not hardy enough to take this step. And yet without it she is guilty of a serious self-contradiction; for she founds her claims to universal acceptance upon her Apostolic origin and authority. If these claims were just, it would only be

following out, by a legitimate inference, that which she teaches, to say openly that she is infallible. She propounds her dogmas under such an implied belief in her members. It is mere pretence to say that she makes the Bible her authority. She does no such thing; because she determines, without appeal, what it is the Bible teaches. She decrees rites and ceremonies, and has authority in controversies of faith. She lays exclusive claim (Rome excepted) to the possession of a valid ministry, and to the legal and spiritual power of a due administration of the sacraments. What more is necessary to constitute an infallible Church? Some of her ministers do declare, on their individual responsibility I suppose, that she is so. They speak of her and Almighty God as one.

Hence the Episcopal Church can no more change than the Romish. It is with one as with the other, — *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, in relation to every particle that goes to make up the harmonious whole of faith, rite, order, vestment, or virtue. It is not the modern, but the primitive Church; for "that which is true is not new, and that which is new is not true." She disdains the light of modern days; she lives in the crepuscular haze of antiquity, in which all that meets the eye

is enormous and grotesque; where credulity and superstition walk hand in hand, and men see a spectre in every tree, and hear an oracle in every breeze that sighs amid its branches.

As a result of all this, such an institution will set itself against whatever melioration the age may attempt, whether in science, religion, or morality. This is her disposition; because such meliorations tend to discredit her conservatism, and expose the rugged and austere features of her system. Nothing is more favorable to her success in this direction than her present liturgy, in which are embalmed all the time-honored ideas of the past; and which she guards with a degree of tenacity common to a love of life in the old, when life is least valuable. Indeed, I do believe that to rob her of one of the smallest shreds of that red rag which she holds in her decrepit fingers, as the evidence of her descent from the scarlet lady of Rome, would be to terminate her existence.

But the Episcopal Church professes to be a purer branch of the Apostolic Church than the Church of Rome. And so she is. But she is grasping at the same clerical power and influence, and the possession of these would develop in her the same vices. This is human nature; and

there is more of human than divine in such institutions.

I would be free from such bondage. Let me seek the truth wherever it is to be found. Her service can tend but to enfeeble the mind and contract the heart. Men are mere accidents in her history. She disowns alike their individuality and their freedom. This idea of a divine right is altogether wrong. All men have authority to declare the truth. The divine right that would consecrate error is no divine right for me.

I have said, in a former part of this letter, that the Church worships three gods. Permit a word of justification for the charge, and I close.

The *Litany* used in her morning service opens as follows:—

“O God, the Father of heaven; have mercy upon us miserable sinners. O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world; have mercy upon us miserable sinners. O God, the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.”

Now here are three Gods, each one addressed in a separate petition as a God. The following makes a further distinction between them as *three persons* also,—thus clearly representing them as three persons and three Gods:—

"O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God; have mercy upon us miserable sinners."

To be sure in this we have these three personal Gods *called* one God; but I do not see how that helps the matter. The contradiction is not a proof, but a disgrace to the functionary uttering it, whoever he may be. Suppose I say, "John is a man, James is a man, and George is a man. These three are three persons; but, after all, they are but one man." How do I prove this? Very simply, "I *call* them a trinity." But does calling them a trinity make them less than three separate and distinct men? Certainly not. I don't think it will require, therefore, an argument to establish my first affirmation, that the Church worships three Gods. To be sure she calls them a Trinity likewise. But what does the word Trinity signify? It signifies three. To say, then, that three are but one, is nonsense.

You reply to me by saying, that, in its application to so great a mystery as the Godhead, it may have a more recondite meaning. I don't understand how that can be. Your calling a thing a mystery don't make it so; nor does it justify its application to that simple idea of the oneness of

God which is appreciable by every mind. To put forth a mystery as an object of worship, looks very much, in this age, like a humbug. But this mystery is such only because it is an absurdity. You don't profess to understand it, and the Church don't profess to understand it; and yet 't is a damnable heresy not to believe it. Had the Church honestly said to her members, "There is a dogma which we find in an ancient creed, which, indeed, is quite inexplicable and very strange. You may receive it or not, as it may approve itself to your judgment. We retain it, because we find it amid the theological heritage transmitted to us from that venerable era, and so conserve it." Then men would have felt very easy about it; and although there might have been found some bookworm, or archæological moth, or erudite Puseyite, to inscribe it upon his missal, no wrangling could have come of it. But to make it a cardinal doctrine, — this was very stupid.

I don't enter upon this argument here, — so much out of place, — because I fear the Church's anathema. She may go on damning people to the end of time, and I doubt that it will turn one hair black or white. I add it merely to justify what I had previously said upon the subject. Nor would



I presume to treat her with disrespect. She is herself the very impersonation of respectability. Wealth, titles, orders, successions, mitres, crosiers, heraldic emblazonings of pedigree, lordly assumptions, and kingly pride,—all awe the observant world into a reverent silence. She moves in the pomp of processions and surplices to the sound of organs; she ascends the throne of spiritual dominion, and thence issues her edicts stamped with the seal of Apostolic authority. Her enemies wither beneath her rebuke, and steal away into oblivion.

Let us say no more about the dignity of human nature. Man is vile. Human depravity is the doctrine with which she represses his rising energies, and dooms him to abstinence and obedience. Mortify the flesh. Abase the intellect. Subdue the reason. Cease to think. Hear the Church. What a tender mother, to take all this care upon herself! She would perpetuate our infancy, that she might always have the pleasure of nursing us. The more helpless we are, the more tender her concern. To be weak is to be dependent. She knows this. And to be dependent is to become a slave. Freedom is error. Liberty is licentiousness. Private judgment leads down to hell.

If one *could* reconcile this to one's conscience,

would it be better? Let those who have gone over to Rome answer. I don't mean by this that the Church is Roman; she is only Catholic. She does not possess the power; she only grasps at it, and abides in the disposition. She affects republicanism in her organization, and regality in her tone. A pope is infallible, but a bishop is only divine.

I must stop here, or you will think I am becoming disrespectful. Such is not my intention. And I am inclined to believe that Churchmen will look upon these remarks as rather complimentary than otherwise. The terms in which you describe a proud man only make him prouder.

## LETTER XIII.

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New York, January, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

WHEN I closed my last letter to you, I considered that I had said all that it was necessary to say upon the subject in discussion between us. But I find, upon reflection, that some further consideration is due to the question of *authority* claimed by you for the Protestant Episcopal Church as a branch of that true Catholic and Apostolic body now represented in the Roman hierarchy. You demand our reception of this branch upon the pretext of its lineal descent from the Apostles, which descent legitimates this authority, invests it with peculiar sanctity, and gives it that precedence — or, as I should say, exclusiveness — to which no other body of Christians can or dare prefer like pretensions. In brief, that therefore you are *the* Church, *par excellence*, — always excepting the Church of

Rome. And it is upon this ground that you stigmatize other religious associations as dissenters, because they differ from you. And this, mark you, not because of difference in doctrine, but in polity.

Doctrines, of course, in a question of this kind, are of minor consideration. *The Church*, "having authority in controversies of faith," and power to ordain rites and ceremonies, can set forth or abolish what objects of credence or observance she pleases, because she has Apostolic authority. This covers the whole ground. In this, your practice is consistent with your pretensions. So, by your canon law, you forbid a minister of any other denomination to enter your pulpits; while, with characteristic self-complacency, you occupy his, — because you recognize no other ministry (Rome excepted) but your own. So, you unchurch all other churches, and call them contemptuously *conventicles*. If a minister from another church come into yours, you reordain him. If, however, he exercise the same liberty to depart from you, you summon him to trial, you charge him with certain grave and unpardonable offences; not against morality, — something worse than that; not against doctrinal truth, — something still more heinous; you charge him with recusancy, — non-conformity. He

may have gone into another church entirely orthodox in its faith,—into the Presbyterian, for instance,—as in the case of the Rev. Richard C. Shimeall. No matter, you proceed at once to “degrade” him in the most offensive manner,—to cut him off from the benefit and succors of that grace of which you (Rome excepted) are the sole depositaries. In this, I repeat, you are consistent. Doctrines, morality, piety, intellectual gifts,—though not lightly esteemed by you,—are held as things subordinate in importance and power to this most precious, indefeasible title of Apostolic precedence and authority.

Now what I wish to do in this letter is cursorily and briefly to examine this title by the light of your own principles and practice; and to see how far it will sustain you in your arrogant claims. My space will allow but a sketch of the argument, which you may enlarge at your leisure, by reference to those authorities which I shall not have room to quote.

Your bishops claim to be the successors of the Apostles; and thence to derive that ecclesiastical and spiritual authority which sets them above all other religious dignitaries in the world (Rome alone excepted) and subordinates them to their supreme direction. Now, suppose we grant this claim to Apostolic succession, “for the sake of the argu-

ment," — which, after all, is but a clerical fiction, — how does it follow as a consequence, that your bishops inherit Apostolic authority? The son who succeeds to his father's estate does not, by any law of inheritance, succeed to the possession of his father's personal gifts and virtues. Your bishops surely *might* be successors in the Apostolic office, and yet not of their function. The seal of Apostolic authority is not to be looked for upon a piece of parchment; it must inhere in the person, — he must do the deeds and display the powers of an Apostle, — he must work miracles. The loftiness of your claims can be sustained in no other way. You may say, that miracles have ceased in the Church. Well, then, it must be because the authority has ceased. You continue, "they are no longer necessary." Certainly they are necessary to substantiate those claims, — they are too extraordinary to be allowed under any other evidence. The Church of Rome professes to exhibit this sign. It is not for me to say how far her professions are borne out by her practice; but it seems to me that she is bound, as a Catholic Church, to make them, and to sustain them, if she can; and not, like you, recreantly to deny them, and so vitiate her own assumptions. To be sure, Christ did endow his immediate disciples with extraordinary powers, —

but not with the ability or right to delegate them to you; for it seems you do not exhibit the necessary proofs of their possession. But you reply, that he promised to be "with them to the end of the world"; and inasmuch as the world has not yet come to an end, he must have included their successors in this promise. Well, why is he not with you *as* he was with them, if you possess their authority? Why, but because you do not inherit it?

No; it is all nonsense to talk about a spiritual legitimacy, to which the spirit refuses to testify. A spiritual legitimacy in a corporate body, enforced by a law of official succession, is one of those monstrous conceptions of a dark age, which no intelligent man in his senses can regard but with contempt.

But you claim to be a *reformed branch* of the Catholic Church, — a Protestant Church, — protesting against that which you allow to be the true Church, the Church of Rome. What right have you to protest against the Church of Rome? Grant that she has erred, is she not a true Church? Did you not come out of her? Is she not your own mother, to whom you owe all that you are, — your Apostolic succession and authority? Are you not legitimate *only* because she is legitimate? I think so. But you claim a prior existence. This is fable, and not fact. Rome invaded England in the

first century; and in the Roman army there were Christian soldiers accompanied by Christian priests. They established in that and succeeding centuries the Church in Great Britain. From the first, there were monastic orders in that island; and the mission of the monk Augustine, in the sixth century, was to revive Christianity, which had nearly become extinct, and extend to it the Papal protection and care. Indeed, the inhabitants of Great Britain had by this time so universally degenerated into paganism, that this might be called their second conversion, and the true beginning of their Church.

But let us allow once more, for the sake of the argument, that the Church had this priority; was it not incorporated with that of Rome,—absorbed and lost in it,—so that it ceased to be the British Church, and only the Church of Rome in Great Britain; thus, in fact, losing its identity as completely as the Church in Lombardy, or Sicily, or in any other part of Catholic Europe? The nationality of the Church was extinguished. There was but one Church; for, according to your own doctrine, the Church can exist only as a unity. So it is not with a church as with a country. Poland or Hungary may be subjugated and governed by the laws of another power; but this fact cannot



destroy the principle of its nationality. To change one's religion, it is not necessary to change one's citizenship. It is merely a change of mind. Yet it is a change more complete and thorough than that of citizenship. The people of England experienced this change. They became Roman Catholics.

Well; now came what you call the *Reformation*; but what in fact was not a reformation, only a *revolt*. But call it for the present a reformation; and I will ask you, By what right, according to your own principles and practice, could you reform yourself out of that divinely constituted body, and in virtue of what doctrine remain yourself a true Church? I would like to have you answer me this question. Will you say, Because the Church of Rome has erred in doctrine? But doctrine, by your own showing, is not a sufficient justification. Do you not excommunicate, or degrade, which is the same thing, the clergyman leaving your Church now, independently of any considerations of doctrine? And do you not hold the act to be valid, because of your Apostolic legitimacy? Well, then, when Rome excommunicated you, upon like grounds, did she not for ever deprive you of this legitimacy? Are you not, in virtue of this act, in a state of schism? Judging you by your own practice, you are. You are no church.

But — mark what I say — you did not reform yourselves out of the Church of Rome upon the ground that that Church had erred in doctrine or in any thing else ; or because you desired to establish a purer faith and a more catholic form of worship. Nothing of the kind. The reasons for that revolt were such as to bring a reproach upon your own Church, as well as upon decency, morality, and religion. And for these were you excommunicated, your ministers degraded, and you for ever deprived of any claim to a legitimacy of succession. Your Church was secularized, — made a mere creature of the civil power ; its “ Supreme Head ” was an adulterer and a murderer, who elected your bishops, formed your faith, and compelled your worship according to his personal views. And I feel bound to add, that Rome had cause thus to deprive you and cast you out. Your own vices and the vices of your “ Supreme Head,” as both Parliament and your *degraded* bishops styled Henry the Eighth, would have compelled any decent Christian body to cast you out.

What were the immediate fruits of this “ *Reformation* ” ? Henry, as Pope of England, persecuted and put to death, not only *Papists*, but *those who desired a reformation* ; upon the same principle that you act, — that Romanism and Orthodoxy

were alike inimical to his supremacy. He enjoined, under the severest penalties, the reception of the dogma of transubstantiation, the celibacy of the clergy, the worship of saints and images, auricular confession, and the celebration of masses. Here was a reformation with a vengeance. Pray what did your bishops of that day think of it? Your Latimers, Ridleys, Hoopers, Jewells, Grindalls, Ponets, &c.? They looked upon this Apostolic succession and authority as a mere figment of Popery. They saw that the Church had been secularized, and they henceforth and for ever cut off from any claim to legitimacy. Hence, they for a long time refused orders and vestments, and desired to remodel the Church upon the plan of the Continental Reformers. In this they were honest, and they were correct. If there ever had been such a thing as this Apostolic succession, and in it there had inhered any virtue, it was dead to them, for it had excluded them, and for very sufficient reasons.

And how is it even at this day? What kind of a royal mother is it that legitimatizes our Yankee hierarchy? Is it the scarlet lady of Rome? O, no; it is the Pope Joan of England. For now the Church *has* a Pope Joan, and historians need no longer puzzle themselves with antiquity. She rules both in the episcopal palace and in the Court

of Arches. Rites, ceremonies, doctrines, successions, — all refer themselves to her arbitration. She, with her council of lay cardinals in Parliament, is the Church, — the true Church; and there is none other, Rome always excepted.

Such, too, is *our* Protestant Episcopal Church; the daughter of England, the legitimate descendant of royal harlots and debauchees; whose bishops were, not a few, men of questionable morality, as well as good Christians. This is the Church which makes her pedigree an occasion for despising others; that leaves them to the “uncovenanted mercies of God”; that denies their right to expound the word and use the sacraments; as “gentiles of the outer court,” dissenters, non-conformists, voluntary associations, heretics, schismatics, — people to be pitied, if contempt allow it.

We can, to a certain extent, respect this arrogance in Rome, and look upon the Papacy as having been made in some degree venerable by the accumulated successes and unbroken predominance of some sixteen centuries. Those who are dazzled by power and the prestige of a long line of ancestry may naturally succumb to its illusive influences. They may think that Providence itself has lent its sanction to the conservation of its errors no less than its truths; that its claims have some

foundation in historical facts; and that the unvarying consistency of its conduct with its principles, — its sturdy and successful resistance of lay influence, — its unfaltering declarations of universal supremacy, — have entitled it to be looked upon as the one Universal Church, that has governed the world, and may govern it again.

But for this upstart offshoot of an English lay hierarchy, here in America, — this daughter of the Church of Pope Henry the Eighth and Pope Victoria, — the present Joan, — excommunicated and writhing under the ban of outlawry from Rome, — for this mixed and discordant body to put forth, in the midst of a democratic population like ours, these arrogant and exclusive pretensions, and to attempt to exercise to the extent of the law's sufferance an ecclesiastical sovereignty alien to the genius of our free institutions, — this is a fact for which we can entertain no respect, but regard only as an evidence of human weakness and pride.

Why is it that such men as Newman, Manning, and Wilberforce — men of immense erudition and consummate ability — have left the English Church for that of Rome? Simply because they knew that, with all its pretensions, it was not a church in the catholic and legitimate sense, but a mere creature of the state, without a title as without a

function. Why is it that Forbes, Huntington, and others, whom it may be convenient now to decry, but who, in reality, were well read and respectable scholars, have also seceded? For the same reasons, substantially. For no man, profoundly impressed with a sense of the importance of securing the Apostolic sanction, — who is conscientiously opposed to an unauthorized and profane meddling with sacred things, — can for one moment doubt that it is his imperative duty to seek to be reconciled to Rome. Every Episcopalian, to be true to his principles, must follow his example. Else the Church in this country must abandon its ground, and modestly take its place among other voluntary associations. And then, simply considered as an organization having in view the better administration of its affairs, and as such susceptible of certain reformatory modifications suited to the temper and intelligence of the age, it may share with other religious bodies our deference and respect. Under any other aspect, we can but look upon it as an impracticable example of bigotry, pretension, and intolerance.

My friend, you may think this language a little too plain to be strictly courteous. But if I thought it unsuitable to the occasion, you should receive an apology for its use. It is not addressed to you per-

sonally, save as the representative for the time being of an untenable hypothesis. My wish is to explode this hypothesis, and to withdraw you from the sphere of its influence. And if truth can do it, I have succeeded in my endeavor,—at least to the extent of the knowledge of that truth.

I do not indeed dislike the Episcopal Church as a church possessing an equal authority among other churches. I prefer its regimen and form of service. And were she content with these, I could have no quarrel with her. But I cannot silently endure this supercilious tone,—this petty tyranny of her bishops and surpliced self-conceit of her priests,—when I know how bankrupt they are in reasons and facts to sustain them. Spite, I have none. I am too well satisfied with my present position and connections, to waste an angry thought upon them. Still, I would they should know that the feeblest voice is not without its influence in the cause of religious toleration and truth.

THE END.















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